"The Beasts of Barsac" by ROBERT BLOCH

JULY

# Weird Tal

15¢

DERLETH

WELLMAN

BRADBURY

"DEATH'S BOOKKEEPER"

A Jules de Grandin story

by Seabury Quinn

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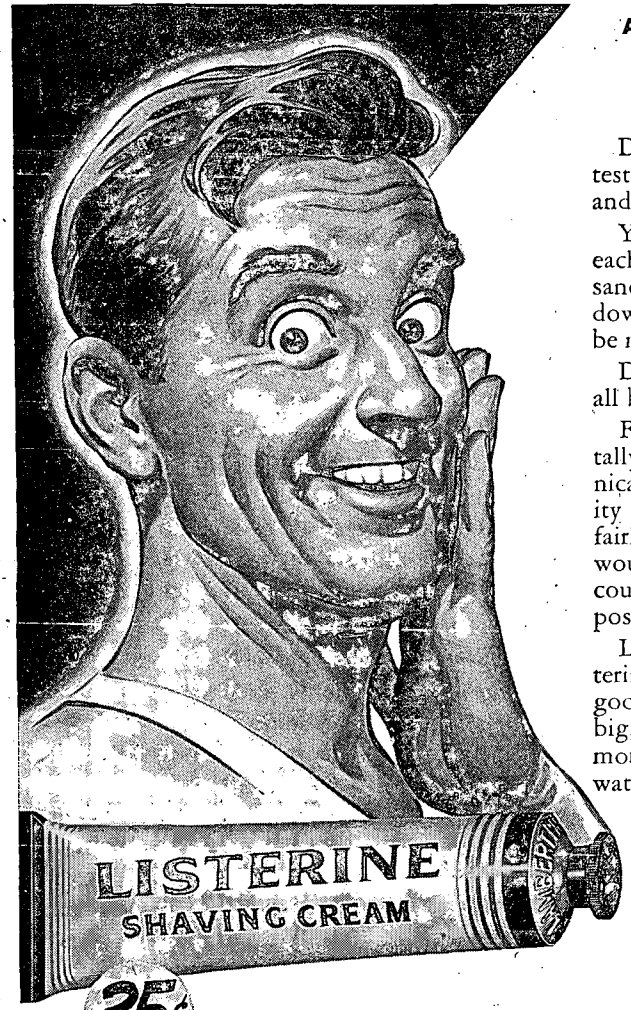
# *Guaranteed not to make shaving a pleasure?*

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# Weird Tales

—ALL-STORIES—NEW—NO-REPRINTS—

July, 1944 Cover by A. R. Tilburne


*NOVELETTES*


DEATH'S BOOKKEEPER . . . . . Seabury Quinn 4

*His office is like a black, evil liar; he waits there like a great spider — keeping the records!*

THE BEASTS OF BARSAC . . . . . Robert Bloch 40

*Nightmare qualities predominated in the great gray bulk — rearing its crumbling battlements against a sullen, blood-streaked sky*


*SHORT STORIES*


JOHN THUNSTONE'S INHERITANCE . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 17

*. . . the atmosphere alone proved the existence of spirit forces!*

PLANE AND FANCY . . . . . P. Schuyler Miller 26

*Might not there be a "fancier" geometry than the "plane" one he struggled unwillingly to digest?*

STRANGER IN THE MIRROR . . . . . George N. Laws 32

*Suppose you looked in a mirror one day and saw not you . . . but someone else?*

GUARD IN THE DARK . . . . . Allison V. Harding 52

*There was a reason why the boy demanded toy soldiers, a reason to be found only in the treacherous dark!*

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*The boarder confessed that he lived in a purgatory where there is neither sun nor Sunday*

THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN . . . . . Ray Bradbury 74

*You can't talk me into that silly wicker basket — she said — for I don't believe in dying*

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*The condemned man was mighty cool on the gallows — almost as if he knew . . .*

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*Watch out if somebody's astral self is after you!*


*VERSE*


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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental*


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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*



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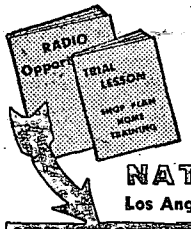


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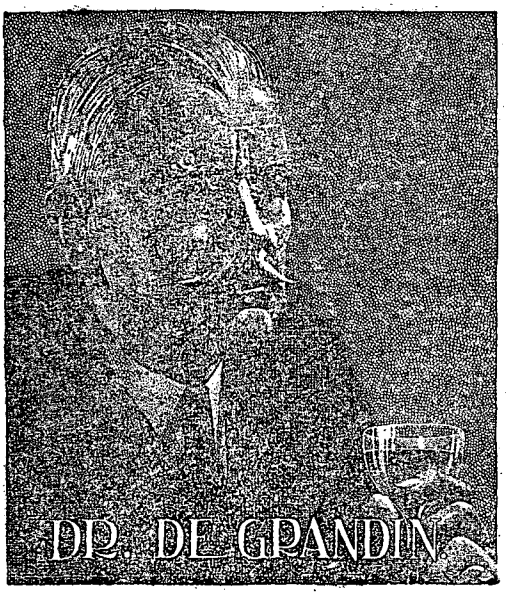
# Death's Bookkeeper



JULES DE GRANDIN, looking even more diminutive and dapper in his uniform of major in the *Service des Rensiegments* than in civilian attire, regarded the highly polished tip of his tan boot with every sign of approval as he exhaled two columns of smoke through narrow nostrils. Dinner had been something of a function that evening, for at a little place in East Fifty-third Street he had found that afternoon a half-case of Nuits St. Georges which he had borne home triumphantly just in time to grace the capon which Nora McGinnis had been simmering in claret for our evening meal. Now, fed to repletion, with coffee on the stand at his elbow and something like a thimbleful of green Chartreuse left in the pousse café beside his cup, he seemed utterly at peace with all the world. "The day has been a trying one at the *Bureau des Rensiegments,* my friend," he confided as he took a half-swallow of Chartreuse and followed it with a sip of black coffee. "I am tired like twenty dogs and half as many so small puppies. I would not budge from this chair if—"

The shrilling of the telephone sawed through his statement and with a nod of apology I picked up the instrument. "Yes?" I inquired.

"This is Michaelson, Doctor," the woman's voice came to me from the other end of the wire.

"Yes!" I repeated. Miss Michaelson was night supervisor of the maternity floor at Mercy Hospital, and when she called I knew what impended.

"Mrs. Morrissey in Fifty-eight—"

"How long?" I interrupted.

"Not more than half an hour, sir. Maybe less. If I were in your place—"

"If you were in my place, I should be in

**Heading by A. R. TILBURNE**



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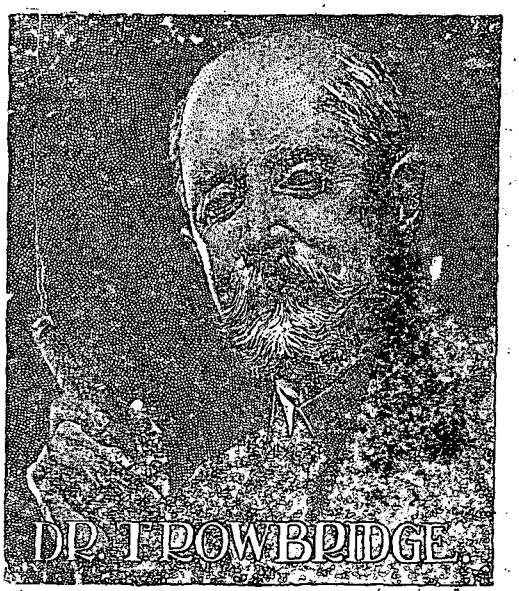
*By SEABURY QUINN*




yours, and not have to drive thirty blocks through zero weather," I broke in somewhat rudely. "Have them make the delivery room ready, if you please, and give her half a grain of morphine if the pain becomes too great. I'm starting right away."

To de Grandin I explained: "Just one of those things that keep life from becoming too dull for the doctor. "The population of New Jersey is due for an addition in the next half hour, and I have to be there as part of the welcoming committee—"

"Will you permit that I go with you to assist?" he asked. "Me, I have so long been busily engaged in reducing the sum total of humanity that it will be a novelty to take part in its increase. Besides, my hand grows awkward for the lack of practice."

"I'll be delighted," I assured him as I hunted up my case of instruments and got into my greatcoat. "But I thought you were too tired—"

*"Ah bah!"* The little laughter-wrinkles deepened at the outer corners of his eyes. "That Jules de Grandin, he is what you call?—the cramper-in-the-stomach? He is always complaining, that one. You must not put too much credence in his lamentations."

IT WAS an ordinary case. Miranda Morrissey was young and strong, and de Grandin's obstetrical skill was amazing. "So—now—my small sinner," he spanked the small, red infant's small, red posterior with a wet towel, "weep and wail, and breathe the breath of life in the process. What?" as the baby refused to respond to his command. "You will not? By blue, I say you

*For everyone who cheats death, death must have another victim!*



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shall! You are too young to defy your elders. Take that, *petit diablotin!*" He struck a second, sharper blow, and a piping, outraged wail answered the assault. "Ah, that is better—much better!" He wrapped the now-wriggling small, wrinkled bundle of humanity in a warmed turkish towel and bore it toward the bed where Miranda rested with all the pride of a cook carrying a *chef-d'oeuvre.* "Behold your man-child, mother," he announced as he laid the baby on her bosom. "He is not happy now, but in your arms he will find happiness. *Le bon Dieu* grant the world in which he has been both may be a better one than that into which we came!"

As we walked down the corridor he drew his hand across his eyes wearily. "There is something more solemn in a birth than a death," he confided. "For the dead one all is over, his troubles are behind him, he is quits with life and fate. But for the one who is beginning life—*hèlas,* who can say what he has stepped into? A quarter-century ago when little boys came into the world we thought they were inheritors of peace and safety and security; that we had won the war to end all war. Today?" He spread his hands and raised his shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman can attain, "Who can prophesy, who can predict what —*barbe d'un bouc vert,* who in Satan's name is that?" he broke off sharply.

I looked at him in amazement. His small, pointed chin was thrust forward and in his little round blue eyes there was the flash of sudden anger, while his delicate, slim nostrils twitched like those of a hound scenting danger or quarry. "Who? Where?" I asked.

"Yonder by the elevator, my friend. Do not you see him? *Parbleu,* if the Iscariot had descendants, I make no doubt that he is one of them!"

I looked where his glance indicated and gave a shrug of disgust. "That's Coiquitt," I answered. "Dr. Henri Coiquitt."

*"Hein?"*

"I don't know much about him, and the little that I do know is not good. He came here since you went away. You never heard of him."

"Thank God for that," he answered piously. "But something tells me I shall hear more of him in the future, and that he shall hear of Jules de Grandin."

The object of our colloquy turned toward us as the elevator stopped in answer to his ring, and in the light that flowed from the car we saw him outlined clearly as an actor in a spotlight on a darkened stage. He was a big man, six feet tall, at least, and his height seemed greater because of his extreme slenderness. He was in black throughout, a long, loose cape like a naval officer's boat-cloak hung from his shoulders, his broad-brimmed hat was black velour; his clothes, too, seemed to be of a peculiar shade of black that caught and pocketed the light. The only highlight in his costume was the band of white that marked his collar above his wide, flowing black cravat, and in complement to the somberness of his attire his skin was pale olive and his lips intensely red. As we stepped into the car beside him we caught the scent of perfumed soap and bath powder, but underneath the more agreeable odor, it seemed to me, there was a faint, repulsive smell of decay and corruption.

Coiquitt bowed gracefully as we joined him, and de Grandin, not to be outdone in courtesy, returned the bow punctiliously, but for a moment, as their glances crossed, both men seemed poised and alert, like duelists who seek an opening in each others' guards. I felt a shiver of something like awe run through me. It seemed to me as I sat in a box seat and watched a drama staged by Fate unfold. These men had never heard of each other, never before set eyes on each other, yet in the glance of each there shone a sudden hatred, cold and deadly as a bared knife. They were like two chemicals that waited only for a catalyst to explode them.

TRAVELING so smoothly we were scarcely aware of its motion, the elevator drew to a stop at the ground floor, and Coiquitt stepped soundlessly across the corridor to the reception room. At the door Camilla Castevens rushed to meet him. "How is he, Doctor?" we heard her ask in a trembling whisper. "Is he—is there any improvement?"

He bowed to her with a superb gentility, yet the gesture had a hint of mockery in it, I thought. "Of course, Miss Castevens. Did

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I not promise you—" He turned and cast a glance half quizzical, half mocking, at de Grandin and me, and with a guilty start I realized we had halted almost at his elbow, drinking in each word he and Camilla said to each other.

"Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge," Camilla nodded coldly as she recognized me, and with an answering bow I took de Grandin's elbow and guided him toward the door, feeling like a naughty little boy who had been caught eavesdropping on his elders' conversation.

"Now, what in Satan's name is it all about?" the little Frenchman demanded as we stepped into the stinging cold of the February night.

I laughed without humor. "I wish I knew. Dr. Coiquitt is a newcomer to Harrisonville, as I told you. Where he came from goodness only knows. We know only that he had credentials from half a dozen Europen universities, and had no difficulty in obtaining a license to practice. Since he set up shop in Dahlenega Road he's raised the very devil with the medical profession."

"Ah? How is that, is he a quack?"

"I only wish I knew. He's certainly not orthodox. The first case I have real knowledge of is one he took from Perry. I think you know Perry. First-rate heart man. He'd been treating Mrs. Delarue for angina pectoris, and having no more luck with her than was to be expected in the circumstances. Then somehow Delarue met Coiquitt and took the case from Perry. Within two months his wife was as completely cured as if she'd never had a moment's illness. That started it. Case after case the rest of us had given up as hopeless was taken to Coiquitt, and in every instance he effected a complete cure, even with Bernice Stevens, who was so far gone with carcinoma hysteria that none of us would operate, because there wouldn't have been enough left of her to bury when we'd cut the morbid growth away."

"U'm?" he pursed his lips. "I take it there is something more here than mere professional jealousy, my friend?"

"I shook my head hopelessly. "Of course, there is. We'd have been chagrinned to have a stranger take our cases and effect cures when we'd abandoned all hope, but that could have happened. Only—" I paused, at loss for words to continue, and he prompted softly. "Yes, only—"

Well,—oh, this sounds utterly absurd, I know—I'd never think of mentioning it to anybody else, but—hang it all, man, it seems to me there's something like black magic in his cures."

"*Ah-ha?* How do you say?"

"In every instance where a cure has been effected someone in the patient's family has taken ill and died within a year. Sometimes sooner, but never later."

He was silent for a moment, then, "Perhaps," he admitted thoughtfully. "The Greeks knew of such things—"

"How's that?"

"I cannot say, at least not now, *mon vieux.* I did but think aloud, and not to any great effect, I fear."

IT MIGHT have been a week later, perhaps ten days, when Camilla Castevens called on me. She was a tall young woman with copper hair and steady blue eyes, past the first flush of her youth—some thirty-two or -three—but with the added attractiveness that early maturity gives to a woman. In the light of the consulting-room lamp her face looked sad, her cheeks seemed hollow, and her red lips dipped in a pathetic downward curve. "I'm frightened, Dr. Trowbridge," she confessed.

I found it hard not to be sarcastic. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask her why she did not take her fears to Dr. Coiquitt, but better sense prevailed, and instead I looked at her inquiringly. Like the priest, the doctor has to be long-suffering and patient.

"I—I'm terribly afraid," she went on as I said nothing to help her. "I don't want to die."

"Few of us do, my dear."

"But I shall have to if"—she paused a long, agonized moment, then with a burst of something like hysteria—"if Richard is to get well. He says I must!"

"He? Who?"

"Dr. Coiquitt, sir. Don't you know, haven't you noticed? He was treating Mrs. Delarue for an incurable ailment. She got well—yes, well, when all the other doctors said she hadn't a chance!—but her son Don-

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ald who was her idol died just as he was about to receive his commission in the Air Corps when his plane crashed in his final practice flight. Oh, I know you'll say it was coincidence; that his plane would have cracked up just the same if his mother had died instead of getting well. But it didn't. She got well and he died. Then there was Bernice Stevens. Nobody thought she had an earthly chance, and she herself prayed daily for death to release her from her dreadful suffering; but he took her case and cured her—and Bert Stevens died within ten months. Of cancer, too. Perhaps *that* was coincidence, also. How many coincidences do we have to have to make a certainty, Doctor?

"I'll tell you—" She leaned forward, and in the light of my desk lamp her eyes seemed hard and expressionless as blue gems inlaid in an ivory face. "I have proof! The man's a wizard; just as much a wizard as those dreadful men they hanged and burned in medieval days. He is—he *is!*" Her voice rose almost to a shriek, and as I smiled incredulously, "Listen:

"You know that Richard Bream and I have been in love for years. We went in grade school together, and to high school, and afterwards to college. We'd planned to be married just after commencement, but the depression came along just then, and Richard couldn't get a start in his law practice. They took his furniture for debt, and evicted him from his office, and he couldn't get even a clerkship anywhere; finally he was forced to take a place as a soda dispenser in a drug store—Richard Bream, Esquire, bachelor and master of laws, Phi Beta Kappa and Sigmu Nu Tau, a soda-jerker at ten dollars a week, and glad to get that much! I had twelve dollars weekly from my work as a stenographer, but two people can't live on twenty-two dollars a week, and besides, I had mother to look after. Then finally Rick secured a place as law clerk with Addleman and Sinclair, and just as we were planning to get married his father died, and he had his mother to support. It was just one thing after another, Doctor. Every time we thought our period of waiting was over something came up to destroy our hopes. I've heard the Indians sometimes tormenting their prisoners by tying them to stakes and lighting fires around them, then, when the torture had become unbearable, offering the poor wretches bowls of cool water, only to dash them from their lips as they were about to drink. That's the way its been with Rick and me for nearly twelve years, Doctor. We've starved and thirsted for each other, and time and again it seemed our period of waiting had come to a close when"—she raised her hands in a gesture of futility—"something else happened to postpone our marriage. At last the war came, and Rick got his commission. There seemed nothing that could halt us now, and then—this unsuspected heart ailment appeared; Rick was discharged from the Army on a medical certificate and went to Dr. Dahlgren and half a dozen other specialists. All told him the same thing. He might live one year, maybe two—he might drop dead any minute.

"I wanted to get married right away. I'm making fifty dollars a week now, and that would keep us. I could love and cherish him for whatever time remained to us, and—oh, Doctor, I love him so!" She broke down utterly and bowed her head upon her clasped hands, crying almost silently with body-shaking sobs. At last: "I was desperate, Dr. Trowbridge. I'd heard about the wonderful cures Dr. Coiquitt had made, and went to see him." A shudder, more of horror than of fear, it seemed to me, ran through her. "I tell you, the man is a wizard, sir.

"His office is more like a necromancer's den than a physician's place. No daylight penetrates it; everything about the place is black—black floors, black walls, black ceiling; black furniture upholstered in black silk brocade. The only light in the place is from a black-shaded lamp on the desk where he sits and waits like a—like a great spider, sir! He wasn't kind and sympathetic as a doctor ought to be; he wasn't glad to see me; he didn't even seem surprised that I had come. It was as if he knew I'd have to come to him, and had been waiting with the patience of a great cat sitting at a rat-hole.

"When I told him about Rick's case he seemed scarcely interested; but when I'd finished talking he said in that heavy foreign accent of his: 'These matters have to be adjusted, Miss Castevens. I can cure your

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lover, but the risk to you is great. Do you love him more than you love life?'

"Of course I vowed I did, that I would gladly die if Rick could live, and he smiled at me—I think that Satan must smile like that when a new damned soul is brought to him.

" 'For every one who leaves the world another comes into it,' he told me. 'For every one who cheats Death, Death must have another victim. I have pondered long upon this matter; I have learned the wisdom of the ancients and of people you Americans in your ignorance call savage. I know whereof I speak. I do not prescribe for the ailing. I give my medicine—and thought—to the well, and they, by sympathy, affect the suffering. If you will agree to do just as I say I can cure your lover, but it may be that your life will be the forfeit demanded for his. You must understand this clearly; I would not have you embark on the case unknowingly.'

"Well, it sounded utterly absurd, but I was desperate, so I agreed. He went into a back room and I heard him clinking glass on glass, then presently he came out with a syringe which he thrust into my arm and drew blood from it. Then he disappeared again for a short time, and finally came back with a tall glass in which some black liquor steamed and boiled. 'Drink this,' he ordered, 'and as you drink it pronounce after me, "Of my own free will and accord I agree to give myself in his stead, whatever may betide."' I took the glass into both hands and drained it at a gulp as I pronounced the words he told me, and instead of being boiling hot the liquid seemed as cold as ice—so cold it seemed to send a chill through every vein and artery in my body, to make my toes and fingers almost ache with sudden chill, and freeze my heart and lungs until I breathed with difficulty.

"Before I left he gave me another bottle filled with black liquor and told me, 'Take this three times a day, once before each meal and once before you say your prayers at night. You do pray, don't you?'

" 'Yes, sir,' I answered. 'Every night and morning.'

" 'So much the better. Take an extra dose of this before your morning prayer, then, and I shall call on Mr. Bream in the morning, make a careful note of his condition, and report to you. In three days he should begin to improve. In two months he should be completely recovered.' That was all, and I left that queer, black-walled den of his feeling foolish as if I'd been to consult a fortune-teller.

"But the next day when I called the hospital to inquire after Richard they told me he was showing marked improvment, and his improvement has been constant ever since."

"That's wonderful," I commented, and she caught me up abruptly, sarcastically:

"Yes, isn't it? It's wonderful, too, that as Richard gained in strength I've lost weight steadily, and for the past two weeks have suffered agonizing pain in my right breast and arm, and have these dreadful smothering fits when it seems that a pillow has been clamped across my nose and mouth. I tell you, Doctor Trowbridge, I am dying; dying surely as if I had been sentenced to death by a court. Rick's getting well, and, of course, I want that; but I'm afraid, sir, terribly afraid. Besides, if I die, what shall we have gained? Rick will have life, but not me, and I—I shall have nothing at all!" Her voice rose to a wail of pure despair.

"Camilla!" I admonished sharply. "Such things don't happen. They can't—"

"By blue, my friend, I think they do and can," de Grandin's sharp denial came as he stepped into the consulting room. "You must excuse me, *Mademoiselle,*" he bowed to Camilla, "but I could not help hearing something of the things you said to Doctor Trowbridge as I came in. You need have no fear your confidence will be violated. I, too, am a physician, and whatever I have heard is under the protection of my oath of confidence. However," he lifted brows and shoulders in the faint suggestion of a shrug, "if you will consent that I try, I think perhaps that I can help you, for I am Jules de Grandin, and a very clever person, I assure you."

REMINDED by his announcement that the amenities had not been observed, I introduced them formally, and he dropped into a seat facing her. "Now, if you please," he ordered, "tell me all that you have told Friend Trowbridge, and leave out nothing.

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In cases such as this there are no little things; all is of the importance, and I would know all that I may be of assistance to you. Begin at the beginning, *Mademoiselle,* if you please."

She rehearsed the story she had told me, and he nodded emphatic agreement as she finished. "I do not know how he does it, *Mademoiselle,*" he admitted as she brought her recital to a close, "but I am as convinced as you that there is something unholy about this business. What it is remains for us to find out. Meantime, if you will oblige us by submitting to a physical examination"—he rose and nodded toward the examination room—"we should like to assure ourselves of your condition; perhaps to prescribe treatment."

There was no doubt in either of our minds when we had finished our inspection. There was a widespread area of dullness round her heart, the pulmonary second sound was sharply accented, and a murmur was discernible in the second interspace to the left of the sternum at the level of the third rib, so harsh as to be audible over the entire pericardium. Camilla Castevens was undoubtedly a victim of myocarditis, and in an advanced, almost hopeless stage.

"I shall not hold the truth from you, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin told her gravely when she returned to the consultation room. "You are a very ill person, and in utmost danger. These"—he scribbled a prescription for some three-grain amyl nitrite capsules—"will ease the pain when it comes on. Crush one in your handkerchief and inhale the fumes freely. For the rest," his slender fingers tapped a fuguelike rhythm on the edge of the desk, "we shall have to seek the cause of your illness, and it is not in you, I assure you. Do not hesitate to call on us if you feel the need of our assistance."

"And I should dismiss Dr. Coiquitt?"

"Not at all; by no means. Desist from taking his nostrums, if you have not already done so, but permit him to attend your fiancé by all means—"

"But look here," I protested, "if your theory is correct he's already done Camilla immeasurable harm. If we permit him to stay in the case—"

"We shall know where he is and what he's up to, *parbleu,*" de Grandin returned. "He will be within the orbit of our observation. When the hunter stalks the tiger, he tethers a goat to a stake in a clearing, and waits in concealment till the striped one makes his appearance. Then, when the moment is propitious, he fires, and there is one more handsome rug to decorate a floor. So it is in this case. *Mademoiselle* and *Monsieur* her fiancé are the bait which we leave for this debased species of a charlatan. Do keep up your courage, *Mademoiselle,*" he cast a smile of reassurance at Camilla, "and we shall do the rest. "Be brave; we shall not fail you."

"THE pair of you are crazy as a brace of loons," I fumed when she had taken her departure. "I can understand Camilla. It's the power of suggestion working on her. There's a book about that sort of thing in the library, written by a man named Manly Wade Wellman. He's made a study of the matter and decided that if belief in illness is induced in someone who firmly believes what is told him, he will become ill—even die—of the disease he has been told he has. It may be that Camilla had a tendency toward a weak heart. Now, if Coiquitt induced her to believe she would develop myocarditis, and administered some evil-tasting drug to be taken regularly and so keep her attention fixed on the suggestion, it might easily be that her constant worry and the fear of impending sickness and death have combined to make that latent heart-weakness active. But as for your believing such rubbish—"

"*Ah, bah,* my friend," he patted back a yawn, "you bore me. Always you must rationalize a thing you do not understand, taking the long route around the barn of Monsieur Robin Hood in order to arrive at a false conclusion.

"It was the power of suggestion, you say? Let us for the sake of argument admit that suggestion could induce such an organic condition as that we found in Mademoiselle Camille. *Trè bien.* So much for her. But was it also suggestion that caused Madame Stevens to recover from advanced carcinoma—and her husband to develop it and die almost as she regained health? Was it the power of suggestion that pulled the young man's plane out of the sky and dashed him

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to his death against the earth? Coincidence, you say. Perhaps in one case, and possibly in two, but in the three of which we know, and in the many which we damn suspect coincidence has ceased to take a great part. *Parbleu,* to say otherwise would be to pull the long arm of coincidence clear out of joint! *Non,* my friend. There is something more sinister in this business-of-the-monkey we are dealing with. Just what it is I do not know, but I shall make it my affair to secure the necessary information, you may be assured."

"How'll you go about it?" I demanded, nettled by his air of assurance.

He spread his hands and raised his shoulders. "How should I know? The case requires thought, and thought requires food. There is an excellent dinner awaiting us. Let us give it our attention and dismiss this never-quite-sufficiently-to-be-anathematized Coiquitt person from our thoughts a little while."

HE WAS rather late to dinner the next evening, and Nora McGinnis was calling on high heaven to witness that the *coq au vin blanc* she had prepared especially for him would be entirely ruined when he bustled in with that peculiar smile that told he was much pleased with himself on his face.

"Me, I have done research at the city hall this afternoon," he told me. "At the bureau of *statistiques vitales* I delved into the records. This Coiquitt person is the very devil of a fellow. A hundred cases he has had since he began the malpractice of medicine in the city, and I find he has prolonged a hundred lives for a greater or less time, but at the cost of an equal number. He is not righteous, my friend. He has no business to do such things. He annoys me excessively, *par les cornes d'un crapaud!*"

Despite myself I could not forbear a grin. "What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

He tweaked the waxed ends of his small mustache alternately, teasing them to needle-sharpness. "I do not quite know," he confessed. "At times I think perhaps it would be best if I went—*mon Dieu,* is it that we are attacked?"

The front doorbell had given a quick, anguished peal, almost as if it wailed in pain, and as the shrilling of the gong ceased someone beat upon the panels with a frenzied knock.

I hurried to answer the summons, and Camilla Castevens almost fell into my arms. "Oh, Dr. Trowbridge," she gasped as I steadied her, "he's found out that I came to you! I don't know how he did it, but he called me on the 'phone a little while ago and told me that my time is up. Rick will get well—he seemed positively gloating when he told me that—but I must die tonight—" Her voice trailed off in a gasp and if I had not held her she would have slumped to the floor in a swoon.

I carried her into the study and stretched her on the sofa while de Grandin bathed her temples with cologne and held a glass of brandy to her lips when she revived a little.

She was pitiable in her terror. Her lower lip began to quiver and she caught it savagely between her teeth to steady it. Her fingers twisted and untwisted themselves, and at the base of her throat we could see the pulsing of an artery as her tortured heart jumped like a frightened rabbit with each beat. "Be calm, *ma pauvre,*" de Grandin ordered gently. "You will do yourself an injury if you give way. Now, tell us just what happened. You say he threatened you?"

"No, sir. I wouldn't call it a threat so much as a statement—like a judge pronouncing sentence. He told me I should never see another sunrise—"

"*Nom d'un bouc vert!* Did he, indeed? And who in Satan's stinking name is he to pass judgment of life and death upon his fellow creatures, and especially on the patients of Jules de Grandin and Samuel Trowbridge, both reputable physicians? Do you rest quietly beside the fire, *Mademoiselle.* If you should have a fit of oppression use the amyl nitrite capsules we gave you. If you desire it, a little brandy cannot do you harm. Meanwhile—come, friend Trowbridge," he turned to me imperatively, "we have important duties to perform."

"Duties? Where?"

"At Dr. Colquitt's, in the street of the funny name, *pardieu!* We shall talk with that one, and in no uncertain words—"

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"We can't go barging in on a man like that—"

"Can we not, indeed? Observe Jules de Grandin, if you please, my friend, and you shall see the finest instance of barging ever barged, or I am one infernal, not-to-be-believed liar. Come, *alons; allez-vous-en!*"

DR. COIQUITT'S house in Dahlonega Road loomed dark as Dolorous Garde against the smalt blue of the winter sky. In keeping with his bizarre personality its owner had had the place painted black, with no relieving spot of color, save for the silver nameplate on the door that bore the single word COIQUITT. No chink showed in the tightly drawn shutters, no ray or spot of light came from the house, but not to be deterred by the tomblike air of the place de Grandin beat a tattoo on the panels with the handle of his military swagger stick. *"Nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un artichaut,"* he promised savagely, "I shall stand here hammering until I bring the filthy place down on his ears, or till he answers me!"

At last his persistence was rewarded. A shuffling step sounded beyond the portal and the door drew back on a crack, not swinging on hinges, but sliding in a groove on oiled bearings. It would have taken a battering-ram to force the place, I thought, as I noted the strong steel of the track in which the heavy oak door traveled.

A Negro, heavy-set and obviously powerful, but dreadfully hunchbacked, peered at us through the aperture. "The doctaire is not seeing patients now," he announced in an accent I could not quite place, but which sounded vaguely French.

"Nevertheless, he will see us, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin promised, and launched into a torrent of words, speaking in a patois I could not make out, but which the other understood instantly.

"One moment, if you please, *M'sieu,*" he begged as he drew back the door and stood aside for us to enter. "I shall be pleased to tell the doctaire—"

"*Non,* by no means," de Grandin denied. "Do not disturb him at his lucubrations. We shall go to him all quietly. I know that he will see us gladly."

"*Bien, M'sieu.* You will find him at the head of the stairway," the servant answered as we stepped across a long hall carpeted in black, with black, lack-luster walls and ceilings.

"He is a Haitian, that one," de Grandin confided as we crept up the black-carpeted stairway. "He thinks that I am an initiate of voodoo, a *papaloi.* I did not tell him that I was—in just so many words—but neither did I deny it. And now"—he halted, braced himself as for a physical encounter, and struck the black-enameled door before us with his knuckles.

"*Entrez,*" a deep voice answered, and we stepped across the threshold.

The room was positively bewildering. It ran across the full width of the house, some thirty feet or more, and the floor above had been removed so that the vaulted ceiling was at least eight yards above us. The floor was of some black and shining composition, strewn with rugs of leopard skin with the heads and claws left on, and the glass eyes set in the beasts' stuffed heads blazed at us with a threatening fury. The walls were dull black and emblazoned with a great gold dragon that seemed marching round and round the room, while across the farther end was built a divan upholstered in black silk and strewn with red and cloth-of-gold pillows. Here and there against the walls were cabinets of ebony or buhl containing large and strangely-bound books, scientific paraphernalia and bits of curiosa such as skeletons of small animals, stuffed gila monsters and serpents coiled as if forever in the act of striking, and baby crocodiles. A human skeleton, fully articulated, swung from a frame of ebony like a gallows, and in a tiled fireplace there stood a retort hissing over a great bunsen burner. Incongruously, on a book-strewn table in the center of the room, there was a massive silver vase containing a great bouquet of orchids.

The man who sat at the table raised his eyes as we entered, and as I met his gaze I felt a sudden tingling in my spine—the sort of feeling one has when in the reptile house at the zoo he looks down into a pit filled with lizards and nameless crawling things.

Coiquitt's eyes were black as polished obsidian and strangely shiny, yet unchanging in their stare as those of one newly dead, and almost idly, as one takes minute note

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of such trifles at such times, I noticed that the lids above the odd, unchanging eyes had a faint greenish tinge and a luster like that of old silk. For a moment he raked us with a glance of cold, ophidian malignancy, then abruptly lowered his lids, as if he drew a curtain between us and his thoughts.

"Good evening, gentlemen—dare I say colleagues?" There was suave mockery that threatened to become stark savagery at any moment in his voice. "To what am I indebted for the honor of this wholly unexpected and I'm sure quite undeserved visit?"

The anger that had shown in Jules de Grandin's face had given way to a puzzled frown, and beneath his sharply waxed, diminutive mustache his lips were pursed as if he were about to whistle. For a long moment he made no reply, and his silence seemed to goad the other into sudden fury. *"Quoi?"* he demanded almost shrilly. "Is it that you come to see a marvel, and are stricken speechless at the sight? I am not on display, my simple ones. Speak up and state your business and be off!"

*"Morbleu!"* Surprise seemed to have forced the word from de Grandin.

"What is it that you—" began the other, but de Grandin ignored him completely.

"Not Coiquitt!" he almost shouted at me. "Not Coiquitt, Trowbridge, *pour l'amour d'un porc louche!* It is Dessiles, Pierre Dessiles, the apostate, false alike to his country and his Aesculapian oath as a physician! Dessiles the necromancer, the *sale espion,* dismissed from the *faculté de médicine,* convicted of conniving with the filthy Boche to sell his country's secrets, and condemned to penal servitude for life on Devil's Island!" He leveled his small swagger stick at the other as if it were a weapon and continued his denunciation: "I had heard he had escaped from confinement and made his way to Haiti and become a member of the voodooists, and when I first saw him at the hospital I was almost sure I recognized him, though when he turned to face me I was just as certain that I was mistaken, for in the olden days his eyes were gray, now they are black. I do not know how he has done it, but I know beyond a doubt now that he is Dessiles, despite the changed color of his eyes. I cannot be mistaken in that voice, that monstrous egotism of the ass who struts about in a lion's skin. However much the leopard has succeeded in effacing his spots or Dessiles in changing his eye-color, the leopard still is but an overgrown, great pussy-cat and Dessiles remains a stinking charlatan and traitor!"

"TOUCHE!" the man behind the table laughed with a low hard raucousness like the crackling of crushed paper. "You are right on every count, my little droll one, and since your knowledge goes no farther than yourself, and you shall go no farther than this room, you might as well know all." With an almost incredibly quick motion he flung open a drawer in the table and snatched a heavy automatic pistol from it, swinging it in a quick arc between de Grandin and me, steady as a pendulum and deadly as a serpent poised to strike. "Be seated, gentlemen," he ordered rather than invited. "When the time has come to say *au 'voir* you may stand, if you wish, but until then I must insist that you sit—and keep your hands in plain sight."

I collapsed into the nearest chair, but de Grandin looked about him deliberately, chose a comfortable divan, and dropped on it, resting his short swagger stick across his knees and beating a tattoo on it with lean, nervous fingers. "And now," he prompted, heedless alike of the menacing, blank stare in Coiquitt's glassy eyes and the threat of the pointed pistol, "you were about to regale us with the story of your adventures, were you not, *Monsieu?"*

"I was about to say that I survived the green hell of the *Ile du Diable.* They penned me in like a brute beast, stabled me on stinking straw in a sty no pig with *amour propre* would consent to live in, made me drag a ball and chain behind me, starved me, beat me—but I survived. And I escaped. Through swamps that swarmed with crocodiles and poison snakes and reeked with pestilence and fever, I escaped. Through shark-infested waters and shores that swarmed with gendarmes on the watch for me, I escaped, and found safe sanctuary in the *houmforts* of the *voudois.*

"They welcomed me for my learning, but, *pardieu,* they had much to teach me, too! I learned, by example, how to make a *zombi,* how to draw the soul from the body

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and leave only an automaton that moves and breathes, but has no mind or reason. I learned from them how it is possible to cast the illness out of one and into another—even how to swerve the clutching hand of death from one to another. Poor little fool, do you know that in the mountain fastnesses of Haiti there are men and women still young and strong and virile who were old when Toussaint l'Ouverture and Henri Christophe raised the banner of revolt against the French? How? Because, *parbleu,* they know the secret I alone of all white men have learned from them—how to turn the hand of death from one man to another. But there must be a willing victim for the sacrifice.

"There must be one who says that he will die in place of the other. Granted this, and granted the such power as I possess, the rest is easy. Life begins at forty, some Yankee has said fatuously. *Pardieu,* it can begin again at seventy or eighty or a hundred, or flow back strong and vibrant into one who lies on death's doorsill, provided always there is one who will become the substitute of him whose time is almost sped.

"That is the secret of the cures I've made, my silly little foolish one. I have not changed the score. Death still collects his forfeit, but he takes a different victim; that is all. Yet I grow rich upon the hope and the credulity of those who see only the credit columns of the ledger Death keeps. They do not realize, the fools! that every credit has its corresponding debit, and when Death finally strikes his balance, 'Too bad,' they say, 'he had so much to live for, yet he died just as she regained health.' Ha-ha, it is to laugh at human gullibility, *mes enfants.* You, by example, would never stoop of practicing such chicanery, I am certain. Oh, no! If you could not effect a cure you would permit the patient to die peacefully, and raise your hands and eyes to heaven in pious resignation. Me, I am different. As long as there are fools there will be those to prey on them, and I shall keep Death's books, collect my stipend for my work, and be known as the great doctor who has never lost a case—"

"I fear you have lost this one, *cher savant,*" the ghost of an ironic grin appeared beneath the waxed ends of de Grandin's small mustache. "We have heard all we desired, and—"

"And now the time has come to say *'Adieu pour l'éternité!'*" the other broke in savagely as he leveled the pistol, steadying his elbow on the table. "You think—"

"*Non,* by blue, it is that I damn know!" de Grandin's voice was hard and sharp as a razor as he raised one knee slightly, pressed his hand against the leather knob of his swagger stick and gave it a sharp half-turn.

The report was no louder than the bursting of an electric light bulb, and there was no smoke from the detonation of the cartridge in the gun-barrel hidden in the cane, but the missile sped to its mark with the accuracy of an iron-filing flying to a magnet, and Coiquitt swayed a little in his chair, as if he had been struck by an unseen fist. Then, between the widow's peak of the black hair that grew well down on his forehead and the sharply accented black brows above the glassy, unchanging black eyes, there came a spot of red no larger than a dime, but which spread till it reached the size of a quarter, a half-dollar, and finally splayed out in an irregular red splash that covered almost the entire forehead. There was a look of shocked surprise, almost of reproof, in the cold visage, and the black, lack-luster eyes kept staring fixedly at de Grandin.

THEN suddenly, appallingly, the man seemed to melt. The pistol dropped from his unnerved hand with a clatter and his head crashed down upon the table, jarring the great silver bowl of orchids till it nearly overturned, and dislodging a pile of books so they crashed to the floor.

"And that, unless I am much more mistaken than I think, is that, my friend," de Grandin rose and walked across the room to stand above the dead man slumped across the table. "The English, a most estimable people, have a proverb to the effect that the one who would take supper with the devil would be advised to bring with him a long spoon. *Eh bien,* I took that saying to heart before coming to this place, *mon vieux.* This little harmless-seeming cane, she is a very valuable companion in the tight fix, I do assure you. One never knows when he may find himself in a case where he cannot make

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use of his pistol, when to make a move to draw a weapon would be to sign one's own death warrant; but he who would shoot quickly if he saw you reach for a weapon would never give a second thought or glance to this so little, harmless seeming stick of mine. No, certainly. Accordingly, when he had bidden us be seated and threatened us with his pistol, I took great care to seat myself where I could aim my cane at him as I held it across my knees, with nothing intervening to spoil the shot I knew I must take at him sooner or later. *Tiens,* am I not the clever one, *mon vieux?* But certainly, I should say yes."

"You certainly got us out of a tight fix," I admitted. "Five minutes ago I shouldn't have cared to offer a nickel for our chance of getting out of here alive."

He looked at me reproachfully. "While *I* was with you, Friend Trowbridge?"

For a moment he bent over the man sprawled across the table, then, *"Ah-ha!"* he cried jubilantly. *"Ah-ha-ha!* Behold his stratagem, my friend!"

I went a little sick as I looked, for it seemed to me he gouged the dead man's eyes out of their sockets, but as I took a second glance I understood. Over his eyeballs, fitted neatly underneath the lids, Coiquitt had worn a pair of contact lenses that simulated natural eyes so well that only a fixed stare betrayed them, and they were made with black irides, entirely concealing the natural gray of his eyes.

"He had the cunning, that one," de Grandin grudgingly admitted as he dropped the little hemispheres of glass upon the table. "He made but one great mistake. He underestimated Jules de Grandin. It is not wise to do that, Friend Trowbridge."

"How will you explain his death," I asked. "Of course, you shot in self-defense, but—"

"But be stewed in sulphur and served hot with brimstone for Satan's breakfast," he broke in. "The man was an escaped convict, a traitor to France and a former agent of the Boche. I am an officer of the Republic, and had the right to apprehend him for the American authorities. He resisted arrest, and"—his shrug was a masterpiece, even for him—"he is no longer present. *C'est tout simple, n'est-ce-pas?"*

The telephone began to ring with a shrill insistence and instinctively I reached for it, but he put out his hand to arrest me. "Let it ring, my friend. He is past all interest in such things, and as for us, we have more important business elsewhere. I would inspect Mademoiselle Camille—"

"You think she may have—"

"I do not know just what to think. I have the hope, but I cannot be sure. Come, hasten, rush, fly; I entreat you!"

CAMILLA lay upon the study sofa much as we had left her, and smiled wanly at us as he hurried into the room. "You did see him, didn't you?" she asked with something akin to animation in her voice.

"We did, indeed, *Mademoiselle,"* de Grandin assured her, "and what was much more to the point, he saw us."

"I knew you must have talked to him and made him relent, for just a little while ago—it couldn't have been more than ten or fifteen minutes—I had another dreadful attack, and just when I had given up all hope and knew that I was dying it stopped, and I found I could breathe freely again. Now I feel almost well once more. Perhaps"—hope struggled with fear in her eyes—"perhaps I shall recover?"

"Perhaps you shall, indeed, *Mademoiselle,"* he nodded reassuringly. "Come into the examination room if you will be so kind. It is that we should like to see what we can see."

It was amazing, but it was true. The most minute examination failed to show a symptom of angina pectoris. There was no area of dullness, no faint suggestion of a heart murmur, and her pulse, though rather light and rapid, was quite steady.

"Accept our most sincere congratulations, *Mademoiselle,"* de Grandin murmured as he helped her from the table. It seems you are on the highway to complete recovery."

"Oh!" her exclamation was a small, sad sound, and there was an enmeshed, desperate look in her eyes. "Rick! If I get well, he'll—"

De Grandin made a little deprecating sound with his tongue against his teeth. "It may be even as you say, *ma chère.* I would not give you the false hope. Again, it may

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be quite otherwise. Have you courage to go with us to the hospital and see?"

THE supervisor of the third floor where young Bream's room was, met us at the elevator. "It's really amazing," she confided as we walked down the corridor. "Mr. Bream has been improving steadily these past six weeks, but shortly after ten o'clock tonight he had a dreadful paroxysm, and we thought it was the end. We had to get Dr. Carver the house physician, for all our efforts to get Dr. Coiquitt on the 'phone were useless. Dr. Carver gave us no hope, but suddenly—almost miraculously, it seemed to me—the spasm passed and Mr. Bream began to breathe freely. In a little while he fell asleep and has been resting ever since. I never knew a patient sick as he was with myocarditis to recover fully, but—"

"Strange things are happening every day, *Madame,*" de Grandin reminded her. "Perhaps this is one of them."

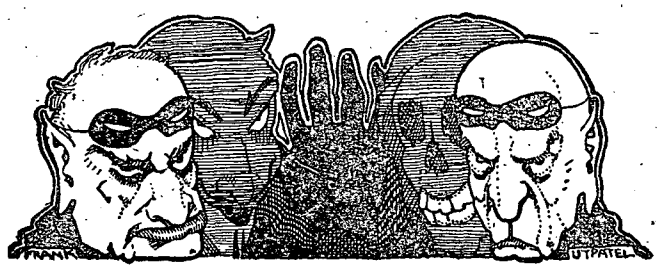
I had not treated Bream, and so had no basis of comparison between his condition as I found him and his former state, but careful examination revealed nothing alarming.

His pulse was weak and inclined to be thready, and his respiration not quite satisfactory, but there was no evidence of organic affection. With bed-rest and good nursing he should make an excellent prospect for some life insurance salesman in a year or less, I thought. De Grandin agreed with me, and turned to Camilla, eyes agleam with delight. "You may congratulate him on his impending recovery, *Mademoiselle,*" he whispered, "but do it softly—gently. The aching sweetness of a lover's kiss—*morbleu,* but it can play the very devil with a normal heart, when one is not so strong—have the discretion, *Mademoiselle!*"

"I'm hanged if I can understand it," I confessed as we left the hospital. "First Bream is dying, then Coiquitt, or Dessiles, seems to cure him, but makes Camilla wilt and wither like a flower on the stem as he improves. Then, when you shoot him, she makes an amazing recovery and Bream seems practically well. If he had retrogressed as she recovered—"

He chuckled delightedly. "He called himself Death's Bookkeeper. *Très bon.* He was balancing the books of Death when I shot him, and as you say so drolly in America, caught him off his balance. The scales were even. She he had sent the psychic message to, but not in quite enough force. Had he endured five little minutes longer, he might have forced her to her death. As it was I damn think I did not delay one little minute too long in eliminating him. At the same time he endeavored to cause her to die he attempted to undo the work he had done for young Monsieur Bream, but his death cut short that bit of double-dealing, also, and the young man lapsed again into the state of almost-wellness he had attained when the *sale trompeur* tried to kill him to death. Yes, undoubtedly it is so. I can no more explain it than I can say why a red cow who eats green grass gives white milk. I know only that it is so.

"And in the meantime, if we walk a block in this direction, then turn twenty paces to the left, we shall arrive at a place where they purvey a species of nectar called an old-fashioned—a lovely drink with quantities of lovely whiskey in it. Why do we delay here, my friend?"



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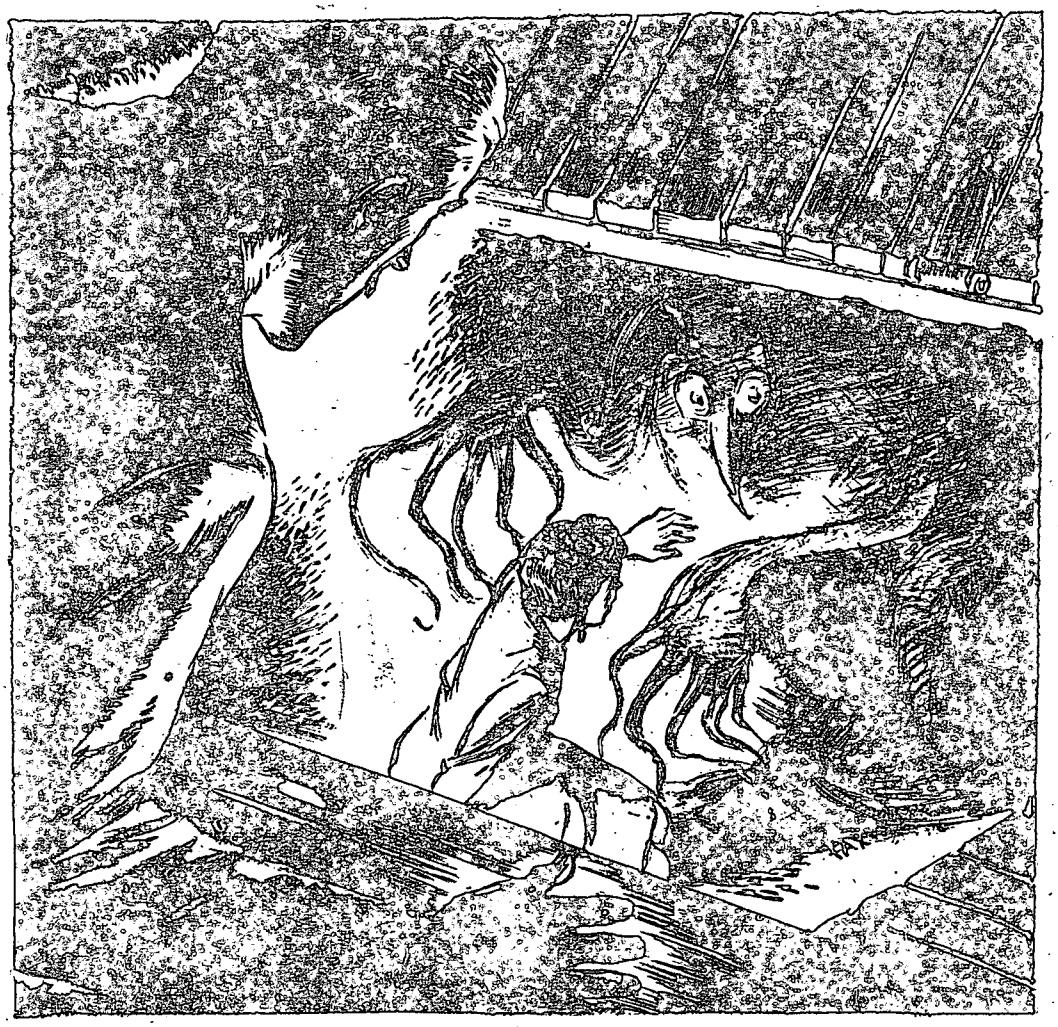

# John Thunstone's Inheritance

*By MANLY WADE WELLMAN*

IT WAS not a first-rate hotel, not even for that section of Manhattan, but Sabine Loel's drawing room on the seventh floor was handsomely kept and softly lighted. Sabine Loel herself was worth looking at twice, a tall, mature woman of a figure both opulent and graceful. She had splendid black eyes and slim white hands that half-concealed themselves in the wide sleeves of her black gown. Her dark hair, brindled with one lock of white, she wore combed well back from her almost Grecian face, and her mouth, though sullen, was curved and warm.

**Heading by ELTON FAX**

*They say I want to practice evil enchantments, for I called him twice and the third time . . . !*



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"Mr. Thunstone," she greeted her caller, with a formality that half sneered. "Won't you sit down? I hope this is going to be a friendly visit—last time we met you were downright unpleasant about my approach to occultism. You did say, however," and she smiled slightly, "that I was attractive."

Thunstone sat down across the writing desk from her. He was larger for a man than she for a woman, with a thoughtful rectangular face and a short, neat moustache black enough for an Arab. His deep-set bright eyes did not flicker under her searching gaze.

"You're entirely too attractive," he assented deeply, "especially as you have potentialities for danger, in your unusual attitudes toward, and studies of, the supernatural. However, I'm here on business."

"Business?" she echoed, and her eyes glowed as his big left hand thrust itself into the inside pocket of his jacket, where his wallet would be.

But he brought out a document instead, something legal-looking in a blue folder, so creased and doubled as to exhibit one typewritten paragraph. He passed it to Sabine Loel, who leaned back to let light fall upon it:

> . . . and to John Thunstone, the character and success of whose investigations into psychical matters I have observed with interest, I do hereby bequeath my house known as Bertram Dower, situated one mile north of the town of Darrington, county of . . .

"I know about Bertram Dower House," said Sabine Loel. "What student of the occult hasn't heard of it? Conan Doyle said the atmosphere alone proved the existence of spirit forces; and John Mulholland isn't all skeptic when he talks about it. The house belonged to old James Garrett, who wouldn't let anyone enter. And there's that story of hidden treasure—" She broke off, and licked her full, curved lips with a tiny pointed tongue. "What's this on the margin? The bit, written in ink?"

"Apparently it's for me," said Thunstone, "but it's cryptic. Something to the effect of 'Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.' Read on."

STRETCHING his long arm across the desk, he turned the folded will and showed another passage:

> . . . with the understanding that the said John Thunstone shall institute a serious and complete study of the phenomena which have excited so much discussion. . . .

When Sabine Loel had finished, Thunstone took the document back and restored it to his pocket.

"I'm in honor bound to study the place, even if I weren't eager to do so. But Garrett was deceived in one particular—I'm not psychic, not a medium. You are. I want you to come with me."

She did not reply at once. Finally: "I didn't know you knew James Garrett, Mr. Thunstone."

"I didn't. I knew only about his place, and the strange stories. He seems to know me only by my flattering reputation. But that's beside the point. Will you come?"

She smiled, with a great deal of maddening mystery. "Why not ask your friend the Frenchman—Jules de Grandin? You and he are very close. Are you surprised to learn that I keep some watch on your movements?"

He answered her questions in order. "I invited de Grandin, but he and Dr. Trowbridge have all they can do in that line just now. No, I'm not so much surprised as warned."

Still she temporized. "Once you suggested, in public, that I was dishonest in claiming to communicate with the spirit world."

"Yet you have the power to communicate, and to do honest business when you wish. If a broker sells spurious stock, can't he change and sell honest shares? I've kept track of you, too. I venture to say that you need money now, this minute."

Again he put his hand into his inside pocket.

This time he brought forth a notecase, from which he took several bills. She accepted them gravely but readily, folded them small between her slender, white fingers.

"When do we start?" she asked.

"Let's have an early tea, then I'll fetch my car around. There's a storm threatening,

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but we can reach Darrington before it breaks."

"I'll get my wraps," she said.

IT WAS twilight when they passed through the little town of Darrington. Thunstone, who had a marked bit of road map to guide him drove up a steep, winding stretch of concrete where he had to put his car into second gear. Trees, their winter-stripped branches making strange traceries against the last pallor of light in the sky, crowded thickly at each brink of the pavement. Almost at the top of the slope, he turned off upon a very rough and narrow dirt road, which brought them at last to Bertram Dower. The house was a tall, sturdy-looking structure, almost like a fort. As they rolled into the yard, sleet began to fall.

"I trust," said Sabine Loel in a murmurous, mocking voice, "that you came prepared with wolfbane and holy water."

"Wolfbane's out of season," replied Thunstone, and made the car creep into a tumbledown shed at the rear of the house. "And I'm no priest, so I bring no holy things. Aren't there other ways of confronting the supernatural?" Shutting off the engine, he turned on the inner lights. Sabine Loel's face, a frosty white oval among dark furs, turned sidewise to him.

"This inheritance of yours—" she began, and then broke off. "Shall I help you with your packages?"

"If you like." He handed her two wrapped bottles. He himself took a much larger parcel, slid out of the car and held the door open for her. Then he snapped off the lights. In unfamiliar gloom they walked slowly around the big house to the roofless porch. Thunstone produced a key, and the lock whined protestingly at its turning. They entered thick darkness.

"What's that white thing?" gasped Sabine Loel, suddenly cowering back.

"A chair in a muslin cover," Thunstone reassured her, and groped his way to a table where he set down his package. Peering about, he made out a fireplace almost directly opposite. Crossing to it, he felt for and discovered logs and kindling. Rapidly he made a fire. It burned small for a moment, then strong and bright. The sleet began to rattle at the windows like hard, insistent little fingertips demanding admittance.

The fire showed them a spacious room, occupying the whole width of the house's front. A door stood open at the rear, and to one side mounted a staircase. All was panelled in dark wood, and bookcases loomed bare, while the furniture was swaddled against dust.

To Thunstone's mind came, all unbidden, the lines of the ancient *Lyke-Wake Song:*

> This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
> Every nighte and alle,
> Fire and sleete. . . .

The fire was doing well now, shedding its first cheerful heat. Sabine Loel moved gratefully toward it. The redness made her pallor seem more healthy. "I wonder where the treasure is," she ventured.

"Nobody seems to know about it, not even whether it exists or not," returned Thunstone. "The story is that some Revolutionary War looter hid it—a bad character, to judge from the implication of ghosts around it." From his parcel he dug a fat coach-candle and held a match to it. He set it in its own wax at the edge of the table.

> . . . Fire and sleete and candle-lighte,
> And Christe receive thy saule.

He had no desire to give up his soul this night, or for many nights to come; but the memory of the quaint old lines might be a good omen. Bishop Peter Binfel's witch-history, he reflected, points out that holy names are protection against ill magic.

"This is going to be cozy," said Sabine Loel, and dropped into the muslin-covered chair that had startled her. "Are you worrying? Remember old beliefs and stories?" And she laughed, as if in triumph that she had half-read his mind.

He smiled back at her, without any pique, and opened his package further. There were more candles, some paper napkins, sandwiches in oiled paper, fruit, and two glasses. Unwrapping one of the bottles, he skilfully forced its cork and poured out red wine.

"Supper?" he suggested, and Sabine Loel made a gay gesture of applause. He uncov-

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ered two straight chairs and held one for her as she came to the table.

But she paused, in the very act of sitting down, paused with her knees half bent and her head lifted. It was as though she had frozen in mid-motion.

"Th-there!" she wailed. "At the door!"

THUNSTONE could not see what she was talking about, for the candle glared in his eyes. He moved, lightning swift for all his size, around the table and to the door beyond—the inner door, that stood open to the rear of the house. All was black there, save for the wash of light that beat dimly past him.

"Don't leave me here alone," Sabine Loel was pleading, and he strode quickly back to the table, but only to seize and light another candle. Holding it high, he pushed into the rearward room. It was huge, musty, full of furniture. He saw another door, closed. As he touched the knob, he started. Something was moving softly up behind him.

"I was afraid to stay there by myself," Sabine Loel breathed in his ear. "Can't I come along?"

"Come," he granted shortly. He peered through the door he had opened. "Here's the kitchen, evidently. And there, to the right, a pantry. Now, then, for upstairs. Are you game?"

"I haven't told you yet," she half-chattered, "what it was I saw."

"No, I've not given you much time. Was it something human?"

"Yes. That is, it stood erect, as tall as a man, with a head and a long body." They had walked back into the front room together. "But it wasn't flesh. It was all misty, and I didn't see any limbs or features." She gulped and shivered.

"Well, it wasn't in the back of the house. Not downstairs, anyway. You want to come up?" And Thunstone started for the staircase.

She almost ran to keep up with him. "What if you meet it?"

"Come along and see." His feet were heavy but confident on the stairs. He held aloft the candle to illuminate a little cell of an upper hallway, from which opened several rooms.

"This," he pronounced, gazing into the first, "is a bedroom. Look at that fine old walnut bureau. This next one is a bathroom. Fixtures archaic, but serviceable. Another bedroom here—and another. That's all. No phenomena to greet us. At least none that shows itself.

Sleet bombarded the slopes of the roof as they turned back down the stairs.

"You didn't pry too closely," observed Sabine Loel, and her voice was steady enough now. "Afraid of finding something?"

He shook his dark head. "If anything is afraid, it's whatever you saw. If you saw it."

IN SILENCE they descended. Thunstone poked the fire-logs with a long, heavy poker of wrought iron, and up sprang sparks and banners of flame. Again they went to the table, and this time there was no interruption. Sabine Loel took her seat facing the inner door, and Thunstone's broad back turned toward that dark rectangle, almost within clutching distance of it. He could not deny a feeling of apprehension, but his big hand was steady as it lifted his wine glass.

"A toast," said Sabine Loel, lifting hers in turn, and at least she spilled none. "I drink to—realities!"

"To realities," repeated Thunstone. "Sometimes they are stranger than fancies."

They drank, and Sabine Loel laughed quietly over the rim of her glass. But her shining eyes were fixed on the darkness behind her companion. He pretended not to notice.

When they had finished eating, and had emptied one of the bottles of wine, both returned to the fireplace. "It seems to be smoking," pointed out Sabine Loel.

"Perhaps the chimney's clogged." Thunstone again took the iron poker, and probed exploringly upward. A shower of soot descended, and he jumped quickly back to keep from being soiled. Not so Sabine Loel, who cried out in excitement, and snatched up something else that had fallen down, from a ledge within the fireplace.

"A little box—the treasure!" she exulted. "No, it's a book. A ledger, tied shut with cord, and dirty."

With a quick pull she broke the cord and opened the book. "Look, here on the first

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page. The name of James Garrett, and some sort of warning: 'This book is for my eyes alone.'" She turned a page. "Don't tell me that he was a psychical investigator, too!"

"Give it to me, please," said John Thunstone.

"I want to look through it," she demurred.

"Give it to me," he repeated. "I'm owner of this house, and it's best that I examine documents." He took it from her hand, not roughly, but without waiting for her to offer it. She stared, with a sort of bright hardness, and wiped her sooty fingers on a paper napkin.

"Will you pardon me?" asked Thunstone. He drew an armchair close to the fire. By its light he began to read the slovenly handwriting. What James Garrett had written began very ponderously:

> I had best enter my thoughts and findings on paper. If this is not a record to impress others, it will at least give me calmness in the writing, perhaps strengthen me against follies of imagination.
>
> They do me wrong who say I want to practice evil enchantments. It is only that I bought this old house, with its weird reputation; haunted, the countryside calls it, and haunted I believe it to be. It is also true that there is a hidden treasure in the cellar—a treasure that I will never let my kinsmen hunt for in their turn.

Thunstone's eyes widened a trifle. "That's why he left the place to me," he said aloud.

"May I take more wine," asked Sabine Loel, at the table. He nodded, and read on:

> I have dug deep and its guard must know that I am close at hand. The least touch of my pick or spade brings him to drive me away. For I called him twice out of curiosity, and the third time . . .

Sabine Loel screamed loudly and wildly, and dropped her wine glass to shatter on the floor.

Thunstone had been leaning back in his chair, as relaxed and comfortable in seeming as a cat. But, like a cat, he was up and out of the chair before one could well follow his movement. The book spun out of his lap and fell on the hearth. His hand caught up the heavy poker and brought it along.

SABINE LOEL faced toward the staircase. She did not turn toward him as he came to her side, but kept her eyes fixed on the darkness at the top. "It started to come down," she whispered hoarsely, and choked on the rest.

Thunstone seized one of the candles and went up the stairs again, two and three at a time. Sabine Loel remained by the table, leaning upon it with one slim, pale hand, her face a mask of expectant terror.

As Thunstone mounted into the upper hall he lifted his candle high, but for the moment it was as if the darkness muffled and enclosed that quivering little blade of light. He had to strain his eyes to see, though he had seen well enough the first time up. In spite of his steady native courage, he hesitated for ever so little. He forced himself to enter the nearest bedroom.

As he crossed the threshold, he thought that something crept to face him; but it was only a shadow, jumping as his candle-flame moved. All else was quiet in the close, cold air. He thought of a creepy witticism in a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "If there's a ghost in the room, it's nearly always under the bed." That was the sense, if not the actual wording. Thunstone wished that all men were here who joked about supernatural dangers. Stooping, he thrust his poker under the bed. Something stirred —a cloud of dust.

Sneezing, he went to the other rooms in turn. Nothing moved in them but shadows, nothing spoke but the sleet on windows and roof. Yet, as he descended the steps once more, he felt weary.

Sabine Loel stood exactly as he had left her. She questioned him with her midnight eyes, and he shook his head. "I found nothing," he told her.

She smiled back, ruefully. "You must forgive me, Mr. Thunstone. I came here expecting things, I'm not sure just what. I may be mistaken in what I seem to see. But you did say that you believe in my psychic powers."

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"I do believe in them," he assured her. "You haven't always used them wisely or honorably, but you have them."

He laid the poker on the table and stuck his candle beside its fellow. Then he went back to the fire. As he came close to the hearth, he stifled an exclamation.

The book in which James Garrett had written his secrets of treasure and terror was ablaze in the fire.

"How did that happen?" he cried, and quickly dragged it out with the toe of his shoe. Too late, he saw at once. The thing was consumed beyond restoration.

"What's the matter?" he heard Sabine Loel asking, but he was too busy to reply. Kneeling, he slapped out the fire in the book. Only a few bits of the inner leaves remained uncharred. He put together two of them, then a third, like bits of a puzzle. Part of a sentence became legible:

> . . . terialized, it can do harm; but materialized, it can also be harmed itself. . . ."

He turned toward the hearth to look for more remains. As he did so, something seemed to explode in his head, and lightning and thunder filled the room. He collapsed forward, and did not see, hear or feel.

HIS wits returned slowly and cautiously, as to a place both dangerous and unfamiliar. The back of his head housed a red-hot throbbing, and his nose pressed against the warm stone of the hearth. He knew that he lay on the floor, face down, but for the moment he could not move, not even for the sense of peril hovering over him.

"Who hit me?" he mumbled thickly.

Sabine Loel did not answer, and he made shift to rise to his hands and one knee, shaking his head to clear it, like a groggy boxer. The dim room, distorted to his vision, was empty of her. As he straightened his body, something slid along it and fell with a startling clang—the stout iron poker, that had been lying across his back. Getting shakily to his feet, he shook his head again. It still hurt, but his strength was flowing back into him.

Sabine Loel's fur coat still hung draped across the back of the chair in which she had sat to eat and drink. One of the candles was gone from where it had stuck in its own wax. Thunstone tottered to the table, clutched it, and bent and gazed at the floor. A blob of candle-grease stuck to the planks, midway to the open door that led to the silent back of the house.

Thunstone shakily put out his big hand for the other candle, then thought better of it. The weakness was leaving his knees. After a moment he moved again, and this time with the strange, wise silence that his big but capable body could achieve. There was little light in the room to the rear, but enough for him to see that the kitchen door now stood open. He groped his way through it.

A great section of the kitchen floor had been lifted up and back, like a trapdoor. From beneath beat up a feeble, pale radiance. Thunstone settled on one knee at the edge of the open hole and peered down.

The cellar of Bertram Dower House was simply a great squared hole in the hard earth, walled by uncemented banks of rough soil. Crude, solid stairs, almost as steep as a ladder, led downward fully twelve feet. Thunstone lowered his still aching head until he could see well below the level of the floor, and gazed downward, in the direction of the front of the house.

From that direction blazed the light, the big candle that had been taken from the table. It was now stuck upon a rock or clod of earth on the cellar floor, and shed its yellow light into a cavelike hole in the frontward bank. Here stooped a human figure in a dark gown, toiling with a spade. Thunstone caught a momentary glimpse of the pale face, stamped with an almost murderous determination—the digger was Sabine Loel.

She knelt as he watched, and thrust one hand into the loosened soil. For the space of a breath she groped, then voiced a little cry of triumph. She lifted a palmful of gleaming stuff, yellower and brighter than the candle-light. It was gold.

Again she took up the spade and began delving, swiftly but shakily. Her head and shoulders pushed themselves deeply into the little cavern, just below a pair of graying

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lumps on the lips of the bank. Thunstone, straining his eyes, could not decide what those lumps were.

But he saw them stir.

He bent lower, lying at full length on the floor. The candlewick in the cellar sent up a momentary flare of strong bluish light. It showed him that whole part of the cellar in brief radiance, and he identified the grayish objects.

They were a head and a hand, strangely shaped and indistinct but unmistakable. And they were moving, slowly and stealthily.

Thunstone's lips opened, but no sound came out. The smaller lump, the hand, crawled deliberately over the lip of the bank and down the face of earth, above Sabine Loel's stooped, straining shoulders. It was somehow only half-formed, a rounded cobble of some foggy substance, and its arm was reed-thin and jointless. The effect was of a strange gray spider with thick, short legs, descending on a preternaturally stout strand of web. The hand opened, the fingers quivered, like the spider-limbs clutching for prey.

They touched Sabine Loel's neck. And she looked up, and shrieked with a wild, trapped terror.

John Thunstone rolled himself into the opening, his hands holding the brink to break his fall. He spun in the air, dropped several feet and landed upright on soggy earth.

His nostrils suddenly filled with a damp mouldy smell, and the shock of his heavy descent made the blue candle-flame quiver. All these little details he noted, even as he rushed.

The rest of what had been on the dark bank above Sabine was coming down. It flowed swiftly and unsubstantially, like a heavy cloud of greasy-gray vapor settling through lighter atmosphere. Beneath it, Sabine Loel was collapsing, but whether in a faint or under the weight of the thing Thunstone could not take time to decide. Three plunging leaps took him across the earthy floor.

The creature faced him, rising to his own height, and higher.

It was like a grotesque body moulded of thick, opaque steam or smoke, its substance churning and whirling within strange, sharp confines. It's head, set on top without benefit of neck or shoulders, looked to be without a cranium as well—it had great, gross lips and jaws, and pointed bat-ears jutted from it, but there were no eyes or brow that he could see. Hands, at the ends of scrawny, jointless arms, lifted toward him, as though they were trying to fumble at his throat. Thunstone had a sense as at the presence of an unthinkable, revolting foulness; but he did not retreat or falter. His big right fist sped straight at the head-blob.

No impact, only a swirling and sucking inward of the vapors. The whole body-form drifted backward, like smoke before the swing of a fan. It hung like a smudge against the bank, and there he saw that it thickened, immediately and considerably, to a slimy wetness. It was no more like moulded vapor, but like a dank daub upon the earthen face, a foul stagnant pool set upon on end. And it moved back toward him.

Its hands came up gropingly as before, to the level of his face.

He felt a moist flick, as if wind had blown a bit of stinking spray upon his cheek. Despite all his determination, he broke ground before the advancing filthiness. As he did so, he almost stumbled backward over the crumpled form of Sabine Loel. Stooping quickly, he scooped her up under one arm and dragged her back with him toward the ladderlike stairs. His eyes did not falter from the presence that slowly pursued.

It had changed yet again. Now it was no longer liquid, but solid.

Still it presented the ungainly gargoyle outline it had first shown, degenerate head upon misshapen body, with gross hands upon reed-like arms. But it had gained substance, as much substance as John Thunstone's own big frame had. Details were now sickeningly clear. Its loose slab lips twitched and gaped open, showing a toothless mouth full of the blackest shadow. Its big hands hooked their fingers like grapnels. They bore claws at their tips, claws as black as crystallized vegetable decay.

To his wire-tense mind came a sudden blessed memory, the memory of that sur-

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viving scrap of James Garrett's burned ledger:

> " . . . materialized, it can do harm, but, materialized, it can also be harmed itself. . . . "

He let go of the slack form of Sabine Loel, and as she sank to the earthen floor, still swooning, he stepped in front of her. Had her eyes been open; she would have seen Thunstone's face grow suddenly bright and purposeful, his lips drawn taut beneath his dark moustache. His wide shoulders hunched themselves, as if power greatened within him: For a third time he set himself in the way of the entity's advance.

Yet again the hands stole toward him. His left arm was extended, pugilist fashion, and the hands found it and closed upon it. He felt those claws of hard rock as they pierced his coat-sleeve, but he did not try to pull or struggle loose. Shifting his stance, he drove his right arm with all the strength he could put back of it, powerfully and scientifically, at that working, grimacing mouth.

His knuckles pulped the blub lips over something hard—the thing must have teeth after all, chalk-textured rather than bony. The witless-looking head snapped back from his blow like a batted ball, carrying with it the body, the arms, the hands. Cloth ripped as the talons tore from their hold on Thunstone's sleeve, and with his freed left fist Thunstone sped a long, clean jab. From somewhere a moan drifted up, the thing could feel pain. Thunstone stepped in, crouching low. The talons, missing a grab at his neck, scrabbled clumsily in his disordered dark hair. He dug his right fist, then his left, into the spongy-seeming middle of the body. Then his right fist cut upward to where normal beings have a chin.

There was a sudden floundering fall before him, and there rose at him two flourishing, kicking extremities that he could not call feet.

HE LAUNCHED a kick himself, and wondered half-foolishly if the torso he struck had ribs to break. Again he kicked and shoved, and the misshapen form tried to roll clear, to get up. He kept after it, hooking a toe behind a hand on which it was rising and dragging it into another sprawl. A third kick hefted its slack, squirming weight bodily into the hallowed-out cavern where Sabine Loel had toiled.

There his enemy seemed to recover itself. Shrinking clear of him, it struggled to rise. But Thunstone had caught up the fallen spade and poised it for a downward sweep.

Though there were no eyes or excuses for eyes in that gray face, the creature knew danger and cowered back. Candlelight, strongest here, showed it suddenly wet like filthy snow in the sun—it was dissolving into flowing liquid again, hoping to trickle away to escape, reorganization, new attack.

Thunstone struck with his shovel, not into the hole but above it.

A shower of clods fell from the walls and roof of the depression, momentarily overwhelming the form inside. It was already half-melted into dampness, and into that dampness fell earth and muck, mingling and disorganizing. Thunstone struck again and again at the earth above and around it, piling shovelfuls of clods as into a grave.

"What—what—"

It was the voice of Sabine Loel. The noise of the struggle must have roused her. She was on her feet, moving close. Her pale, handsome face showed no terror, only mystification and some embarrassment. Plainly she only half remembered what had frightened her, literally, out of her wits.

Thunstone paid no attention, but hurled still more earth into the cave, and more. Some black dampness seeped through for a moment, and he flung a fresh spadeful upon it. Then he paused.

"Let it finish its change now," he said, when he caught his breath. "Even if it's vapor again, this dirt will confine it tonight. Tomorrow I'll be back with workmen and cement mixers. This cellar shall be filled to the brim with concrete—marked with protecting symbols—"

Sabine Loel was at his side. Now she was remembering. Her eyes flickered in horror. She held out a trembling right hand, in which she still clutched half a dozen broad pieces of gold.

"I found these—" she began.

Roughly, Thunstone snatched them from her and flung them into the pit. He shoveled

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more dirt upon them. She cried out in protest, a hand at her brow from which sprouted the waving gray lock of hair.

"You can testify now to the meaning of tainted money," Thunstone told her flatly. "The treasure and its guardian seem to go together. It threatened James Garrett, it threatens us. Some would be trite and call the gold accursed. I call it unprofitable." Once again he threw in earth. "Let the thing stay shut up here, and its gold with it."

"But there's a fortune," protested Sabine Loel frantically. "I'd touched only the top. There's enough to—"

"It was left to me, by the will of James Garrett." Thunstone toiled on without easing. "I half-guessed that something like this would happen. You, with your power and your deceit, were exactly what was needed to tempt the thing forth, so that it could be defeated and hereafter kept out of reckoning. As I construct it, you read James Garrett's ledger while I was upstairs alone."

"Why," she stammered in confusion, "why—"

He smiled as he dug his spade into fresh earth. "I'll hazard a guess. I'd paid you to hunt spirits, so you began by pretending—only pretending—to see something as we sat down to eat."

SHE did not deny it, but lowered her head.

"That was only mischief on your part," he went on. "Then, when I found the book in the chimney, you pretended again to see something on the stairs. That was to start me on another chase, so that you'd have a chance to read. You quickly skimmed through what Garrett had written about where the treasure was to be dug for. To keep me from seeing it too, you threw the book into the fire. Isn't that true?"

Still she kept guilty silence. Thunstone smiled more broadly, completely without malice.

"And you hit me on the head with the poker, eh? Thought to get the money while I lay unconscious. But I woke up sooner than you thought, just in time to save you from what you had summoned."

"I!" she cried, finding her voice at last. "I summoned it!"

"You were too greedy to remember what James Garrett wrote in his book, and on the margin of the copy of the will sent to me. 'Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.' That's exactly what you did. Twice you pretended to see something terrible, to deceive me. The third time, there was no deception. The guardian of the treasure rose to deal with you."

Sabine Loel's face was white, but calm. "Listen," she pleaded. "Be sensible. There is too much money here to let lie."

"No," he replied, "there is not too much money here to let lie." Stooping, he gazed at his heap of earth. Above it hung a swirl of grayish vapor, no larger than the upward waft of a cigarette's smoke. He patted the place with the bottom of the spade, and the vapor vanished.

"We could both be rich," Sabine Loel persisted. "We can come and dig tomorrow, by daylight. We could bring crucifixes, priests, any protection you want."

"We'll never dig for it," he said.

"We must," she fairly sobbed. Her white hand caught his sleeve, the same sleeve that had been torn by filthy talons. "Listen, I say. You admit I'm attractive—well, I'll be yours. I'll spend my life making you happy beyond any dream. I can do that. You'll have both the gold and me."

He did not answer, did not even look at her.

She brought her beautiful white mask of a face close to his, fixing his eyes with hers. "Am I so easy for a man to refuse?" she murmured softly.

"No," said John Thunstone honestly. "You are by no means easy for a man to refuse. But I refuse you. I'll fill this hole tonight. Tomorrow it'll be sealed so that only dynamite will ever open it. Of course, if you feel that you can't live without the treasure, I'll go away now. You may remain alone, with the spade and the candle, and dig up everything I've buried."

Sabine Loel drew back, and bowed her head again. This time she was accepting defeat.

John Thunstone resumed his shoveling.

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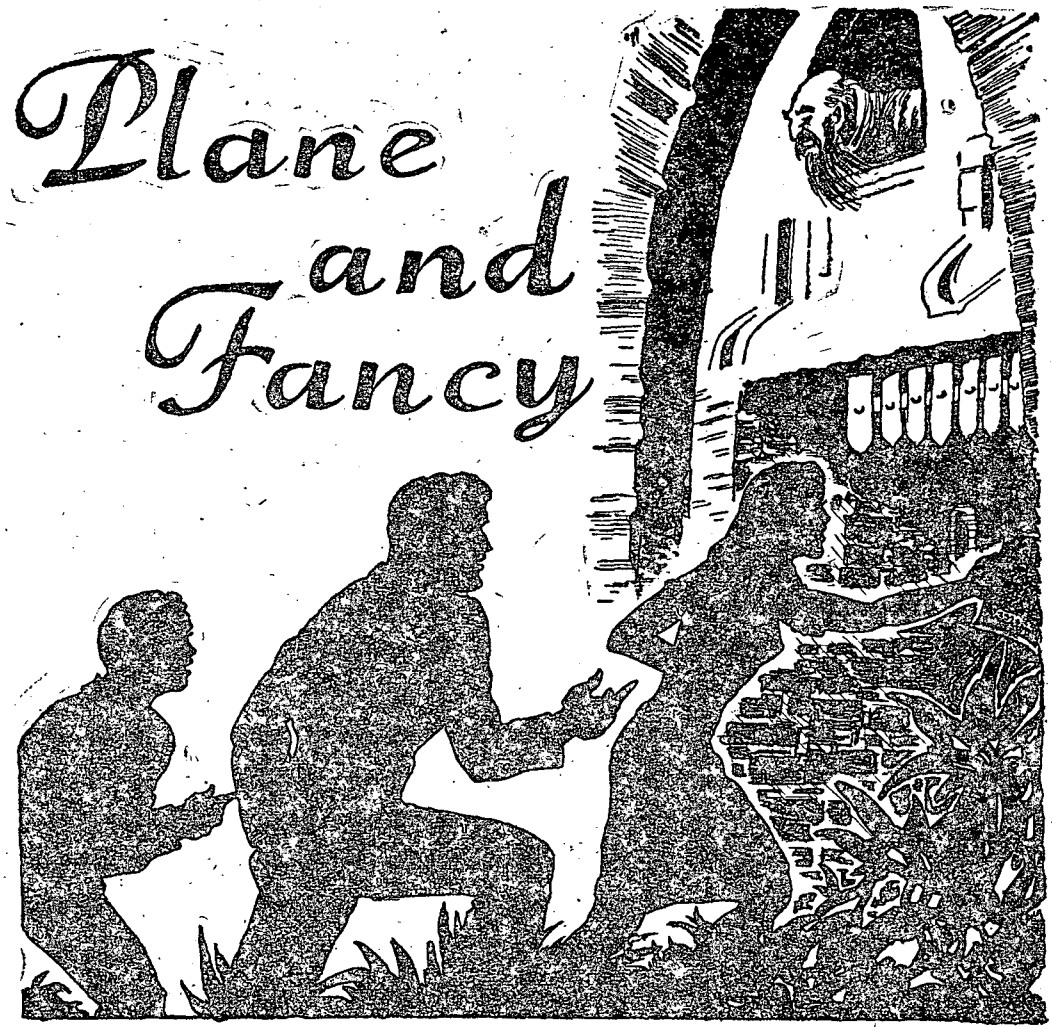
# Plane and Fancy



*By P. SCHUYLER MILLER*

IT WAS one of those golden autumn days when the air is like crystal and the hills are adrift in sunshine. It was a day when the cliffs of Keer would be smoky purple curtains drawn across the plain, and the hill towns would be white pebbles strewn over the gray moorland. It was a day to be in the saddle, breathing the drift of smoke from the bog fires, hearing the drum of a stallion's hooves on the hard-packed road, feeling the wind sing by. It was no day to be in school.

Tommy Darrow's seat was near the window, and he could see the hills back of Eastham. They were good hills. He had roamed them, mostly alone, ever since he was old enough to be away. The colors of autumn were painting them—the red fire of a maple, yellow drifts of birches, scarlet lines of sumac tracing the fence rows. The pines were dark forefingers pointing at the sky, and the cedars advanced across the high pastures like a storming army. The window was open, and he could smell leaves burning on the playground outside the school.

He looked at the book which lay open on

**Heading by A. R. TILBURNE**

*The land of Keer is a strange world—certainly not of this earth—in some ways feudal, in others oddly advanced.*



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his desk. *Plane Geometry* by Tuncliffe, Witherall and Jenkins. He looked at the diagrams of lines and angles printed on its well-thumbed pages. If they had ever had a meaning, it was lost to him.

Somebody was poking him: Jimmy Johnson, in the seat behind. He looked up. They were all looking at him. Mr. Andrews, the new math teacher, was watching him, tapping with his fingernails on a crisper, cleaner copy of the same brown book.

"Well Darrow—we're waiting." Mr. Andrews had come to Eastham from a private school, and he found the atmosphere of public education a little trying. Tommy got slowly to his feet.

"Well, Darrow? I understand this is your third term in this class. Surely you can explain the theorem?"

Tommy licked his lips. It was always the same. There was no meaning in the stuff—it didn't hang together. It had been the same all through grade school. Arithmetic—algebra—they weren't right. His mind rejected them. He'd trained himself to memorize stuff—take it on faith—parrot it out when the teachers asked for it, but this geometry was the worst of the lot. It was twisted—distorted—wrong. He licked his lips.

"Mr. Andrews," he said thoughtfully; "this book—it's 'plain' geometry. Isn't there any fancy geometry?"

Lying in his bed, snug up under the slope of the roof, with the moonlight making ranges of hills across the bed-quilt, Tommy wondered about it. Why shouldn't there be a fancy geometry as well as the plain kind? Why shouldn't there be a kind of geometry that didn't refuse to fit together when he tried to reason it out? Why wasn't there another kind of geometry—*his* kind of geometry?

He was still wondering when his eyes closed and the purple cliffs of Keer rose in the moonlight.

THIS is not a story of Keer or its people. We have Tommy Darrow's own stories to give us some idea of that marvelous realm. His aunt, being a practical woman, never thought much of them, but the teacher who had taught him to write, back in the little district school at Beeman's Corners, had always saved them. They tell us what little we know of Keer.

It goes back further than that, really. Almost as soon as he could talk, Tommy Darrow would tell his stories. If there was no one to listen, he would slip away behind the barn and babble to himself. His aunt tried to discourage it; she thought it queer, and was afraid that others would agree. There had never been queerness in her family, and she didn't want gossip starting. She might have tried to stop the moon from rising.

In the one-room country school there was no place for much but the regulation three R's, but the new teacher was fresh from normal school and had had a brief contact with some of the newer ideas in education. She asked the children to write little stories of their own about the things they did, and if they couldn't write she let them tell them to the class, and she would write them down. The first stories of Keer are in her writing.

They are a child's stories—stories of little things, things a child would find wonderful. But they are dream stories, of a beautiful far-off land where people and things are as they should be in dreams. They mature quickly, as though the Tommy Darrow who roamed the fabled moors of Keer grew older than the rather quiet little boy who sat in his corner, tongue in his teeth, scrawling his stories painfully on a ten cent pad.

The other children liked them. They recognized that Tommy was queer, but it was a fascinating sort of queerness, and—which is rather strange when one considers the normal savagery of children of their age toward the outlander—they accepted it. When there was a new boy who might have picked on him, they protected him, and I doubt that he ever realized that he was being shielded. In Keer it was he who was the shield—he who rode the night, his cloak flung out behind him, his sword loose in its scabbard. He was glad that they liked to listen when he had a story to tell. He was glad they sometimes asked him to tell one when they were out of school, off in the hills after nuts or squirrels. He would sit on a rock with them sprawled in the grass at his feet, and keep them spellbound

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with the magic of his cloud-swept kingdom beyond the purple cliffs. When the five districts were consolidated and they went in to Eastham to the new central school, he was glad that his teacher went with them, because it was she who suggested that they could have a paper of their own—not as fine, perhaps, as the high school journal, but a little mimeographed leaflet which they could plan and print and sell to their schoolmates. In its pages Tommy's chronicles of Keer gained a wider and a more demanding audience.

IN THESE stories, and in the tales which Tommy Darrow's boyhood friends remember, Keer takes shape. It was a strange world, certainly not of this earth—in some ways feudal, in others oddly advanced. It had its sorcerers, black and white, but we might have called them scientists. It had its lords and ladies and pomp and ceremony, but it was a nobility of the common people. Tommy's father in that other world was a smith, a bearded, brawny man who forged swords of miraculous strength and keenness, respected by all, feared by none, with a hearty, roaring laugh that would echo down the glens of a frosty morning. His mother was young and golden haired, with a voice that soared up in the morning like a bird's, and a firm but gentle hand for a horse. His own parents, here in our world, he had never known.

Even when they reached high school, Tommy's schoolmates never tired of his tales, and he was kept busy writing them out in his laborious scrawl for the school paper. One girl, a year younger than Tommy, had tried to illustrate them, but she had never seen Keer. She grew tearful when he tried to explain where the difference lay.

The girls in Keer were not like the girls he knew in Eastham. They were more mature and less concerned with the proper affairs of men. He was a shy boy, or at least a retiring one. He still loved to roam the hills, but it was alone now, or with a dog. He had an irritating way of treating his fellow pupils, boys and girls alike, as though they were children.

It was early October when Tommy Darrow first began to wonder whether there might not be another—a "fancier"—geometry than the one he struggled to digest in school. He had set his teeth and resolved to swallow the stuff, logic or no logic, and he was getting on better with Damon Andrews, Ph.D. The young teacher recognized that what Tommy was giving him was purely parrot-talk, but he decided that after three terms in the class it was all that anyone could ask of the boy if he passed the Regents with a decent mark. Tommy's aunt, his mother's older sister, was a trustee of the school.

In school Euclid was the law, but out of school, when the chores were done and he could go up to his room or climb up to the open ledges back of town, the other, fancier brand of geometry gradually took shape in his mind. Once it was started it came easily to him. It was not too much different from the "plain" variety of the little brown book, but what differences there were seemed to be fundamental, and he began to see why Euclid seemed alien and unreasonable. He had all of the simpler theorems in his head before he wrote any of it down, and then he did it in the hieratic script of Keer, which he had never before put on paper. It somehow seemed to fit the odd, non-Euclidian structure which he was building.

It was soon clear to him that this was the geometry of Keer itself that he was setting down—not alone of the misted moorland kingdom with its five towns, but of its world—its entire universe. When he had the rudiments of the geometry down on paper he went back to the algebra, and saw where it was that he had gone astray, and where the altered laws should lead. It all fell together simply and beautifully. His fingers seemed almost to run of themselves, and one afternoon as he sat at his attic window writing he looked up and through the flawed panes saw the purple cliffs of Keer striding away into the twilight behind the patched roof of his uncle's barn.

THE new passion that had gripped him was soon evident to his teachers. Tommy had been a good student, though never a brilliant one save in his writing, and they were on the wild side, tolerated mainly because of the vogue for self-expression which was finding its way into places like Eastham under the impetus of teachers' conventions

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and bulletins from Albany. He had, in a literal sense, known the answers—word for word, once he put his mind to it—and had even earned himself a "B" in plane geometry and was doing well in solid. Then had come a change. It was gradual, and it did not affect all his studies at one time. It seemed to be a slow loss of interest—even in his writing—which affected everything but his mathematics. The faculty was at first inclined to accuse Damon Andrews of overworking the boy, and then they joined forces to agree that he must be dealt with according to the precepts of child psychology.

Helen Winship was the teacher who had come with Tommy from the little one room school where she had first taught and he had first listened patiently and politely to her teaching. She was a little older now, but not too old to believe in a kind of magic.

She volunteered to talk with Tommy, to find out what was wrong, before more drastic steps were taken to bring him into line. And so she was the first to see the strange new geometry of fabled Keer.

He took the notebooks out of the hole under the floor boards where he kept them. His aunt would have had no sympathy with such truck had she known of it; even his stories were hidden there, although she was rather proud of the grudging deference which the parents of some of his schoolmates showed her for harboring so "talented" a boy. The characters of the script were, of course, unintelligible to the teacher, and the diagrams were extremely odd, seeming somehow ill-fitted to the flat surface of the paper. Some of them seemed almost to have depth and extension, and even a kind of motion of their own. They meant nothing to her as they were, but she asked to borrow them, and he agreed.

Helen Winship had a great respect, and maybe a little more than respect, for Damon Andrews. He was young; he had made a brilliant record in college; and she had accidentally come across his name in a mathematical journal where one would scarcely look for a paper by a village schoolmaster. She took Tommy Darrow's notebooks to him. When he snorted and pushed them back at her, she smiled her sweetest and sat patiently opposite him while he turned the pages.

At first she could see that he was skimming—obliging her, but nothing more. She was glad that he wanted to oblige. Then, about a third of the way through the first book, something caught his eye or registered on his brain. He stopped, frowned, bent over the page. He riffled back a few pages and seemed to follow an argument which was developed there. Finally he turned clear back to the beginning, and she could see the muscles of his jaw working slowly as he toiled through the unaccustomed symbols. He never even looked up when she finally slipped away.

THE next day was Saturday. Damon Andrews missed the morning colloquium at the post office, and he wasn't in the ice cream parlor that night at the regular time. He was not in church on Sunday, although he had a class in the boys' department. He came into her homeroom on Monday morning, just after the passing bell, with Tommy's notebooks in his hand. She stepped out into the hall with him.

"This stuff is amazing," he told her. "I don't see why he's had to write it in this gibberish, but what I can follow is real. It's true. It isn't Euclid, God knows. It isn't anything I've ever seen or heard of—"

Tommy calls it fancy geometry," she interrupted.

"Of course, but that's only a name. It's a kind of private joke." He hesitated. "If the kid can do this kind of thing, why can't he get Euclid?"

"I thought you understood that. He doesn't believe in Euclid. It isn't real—not for him."

He snorted. "You mean that crazy stuff he writes? That Flash Gordon—Grustark—Tarzan nonsense? What's that got to do with it?"

She took the notebooks from him. "Let me have these," she said. "The bell will be ringing, and I promised Tommy that he would get them back this morning. Perhaps we can talk about it at lunch."

Winter had gone by, and it was spring. There was a chill in the air, and the ground was frozen along the north slopes, but a thin green gauze was veiling the willows

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as they climbed the hill behind the school and picked a sun-warmed boulder to shelter them from the wind while they ate their lunch.

She had the notebooks with her. They unwrapped their packets of sandwiches, uncorked their thermos bottles of coffee, and chewed diligently while somewhere below them a redwing shouted for pure glee. When they had finished he gave her a cigarette, took one himself, and leaned back against the rock.

"Someone who can really understand the stuff should see those books, you know," he told her. "I think they're important. It's beyond me how a kid like Tommy Darrow could have produced them, but I'll take your word for it. I want you to get his permission to take them to a man I know of—a man who lectured at Columbia last summer while I was there. Nobody much was at the lecture, but he said some amazing things. He could tell what this means, if anyone can."

She frowned. "Is that fair, do you think? It's Tommy's work. Shouldn't he present it, rather than some third person?"

Andrews flushed. "I hope you don't think I'd claim credit for it myself! I never taught him this, or anything like it. I couldn't. No one could. But I want Halcyon to see it and pass on it before anyone tries to do anything about it."

She stubbed her cigarette out on the ground beside her and gathered up the papers from her lunch. The noon bell would be ringing soon.

"I'll talk to Tommy," she said. "I think he should go along."

It was a long trip, and there were the school authorities to persuade, because it would take more than a week-end. Then Tommy's aunt had to be convinced that this was something which would bring credit to her line rather than further notoriety to the no-good Darrows, and that there might—there just might—be money in it in the long run. They decided to defy gossip and use Helen's car, because it would save them a day.

It was a glorious drive, the April sunshine warm on their faces, the smell of springtime moist and rich in their nostrils, the soft blue of spring in the sky. Helen drove and Tommy sat between them, his gaze far away—beyond the woods and mountains—beyond the green expanse of the sea when they came to it—among the hills of Keer.

TWO journeys were made that day in spring. As Helen Winship's car raced on beside the sea, Shannakar of Keer rode over the high plateau beyond the purple cliffs with two tried friends. They were on a mission, and what its nature might be was not entirely clear, even to Shannakar, for there was a wise woman's prophecy mixed up in it, and a message written in gall on soft white silk, and a lock of raven hair. They were not in the livery of Keer, and their skins were stained dark, and their collars pulled up around their chins as they rode down out of the moors into the oak forests beside the black, still sea. Their horses' hooves drummed on the packed sands, and in the distance they heard the deeper thunder where the great breakers which came sweeping out of the east broke against the savage rock of Vrann.

"We'll be there soon," Andrews said over the boy's head. "Hear the surf pounding? His place is out on a headland, with nothing between him and Spain except Atlantis." He glanced down. "The kid asleep?"

She shook her head. "Dreaming, I think, but not asleep. Let him be. Time enough when we're there."

There were no sentries out, and it bothered Shannakar. They had taken the usual precautions, but he wondered whether Sagai's seers might not have a magic which would pierce the veil he had woven. As they drew near to the crag the pattern of his quest began to take shape in his mind. It was a matter of a spell—a ritual of words and diagrams which somehow linked Keer with that other world he often visited in dreams—a formula which would somehow open gates which might not easily be closed. There was a danger to Keer, though what it was he could not precisely say. Enough that he was going alone into the castle of his enemy to seek it—or to use it.

The place was a looming heap of stone, almost a part of the headland on which it was set. No lights were showing in the

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arched windows as Helen turned the car into the winding drive which circled round the base of the crag and ran out along the narrow spine of rock which joined it to the mainland.

"Are you sure he's here?" she asked.

"He said he'd be." Andrews leaned out and peered ahead. "Maybe it's the blackout. Gloomy old pile, isn't it?"

THE three companions left their horses at the base of the crag and approached the castle on foot. Shannakar's brain was clearing fast, and a deep fear was growing in him. Was this his secret after all, or was it a ruse of Sagai's—a magic of some kind, luring them hither for purposes of the Black Prince's own? Momentarily a curtain dropped over his eyes, and he could not recognize the faces of the two who strode beside him, their naked swords frosty in the starlight.

Then the high arch of the doorway rose before them, black and empty against the grim gray wall of the castle. The man on his right—was it Hannar or a stranger?—knocked with the pommel of his sword on the oaken door, setting the echoes ringing.

They stood a moment in the darkness, waiting. Then the door opened and yellow lamplight flooded out into the stone paved vestibule, silhouetting the gaunt black figure of an old man. He stepped aside, and the lamplight played over a hooked beak of a nose, over a straggling white beard, thin lips, and a deep-lined face. Shadows made skull-pits of the hot old eyes.

Shannakar of Keer—Tommy Darrow of Eastham—stepped into the house of the Black Prince Sagai. The two who were with him moved soullessly behind him, trapped by the malign power of those ancient eyes. The little books with their written secrets—the symbols and diagrams of the strange geometry which would link Earth and Keer, and give their master free range and power over both, here in this place where the two worlds were one—dropped from Helen Winship's hand.

And Sagai smiled and picked them up as he closed the great oak door with its carved kingfishers—the halcyon standard of the evil breed of Vrann.

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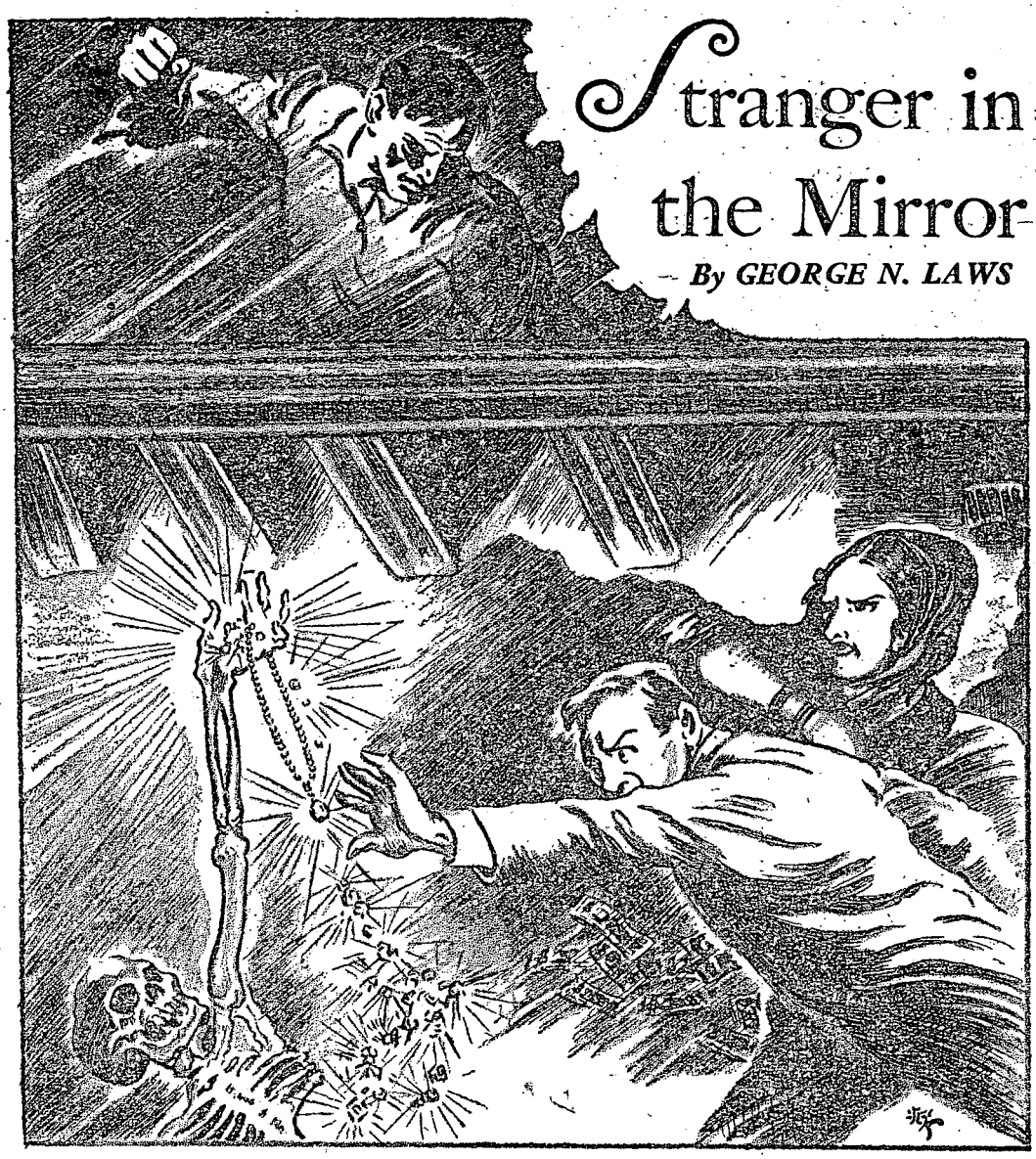
# Stranger in the Mirror

By GEORGE N. LAWS



Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

HELLO, warden. Nice of you to come in. They asked me if I wanted a priest, but I told them I had no quarrel with God, just a few things to talk over with a fellow human being. And I guess I'm still that, even if I'll only be a memory tomorrow.

Sit down here, and have some candy. Nice of you folks to let my girl bring it to me right along. Good, isn't it? Odd

*You who fear the terror of dreams, remember—there are some hideous terrors of living far greater!*



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sort of flavor, but it grows on you. Have some more.

Do you mind if we leave the light out, here in the cell? That yellow light in the corridor is enough to see by, and it has a pleasant, quieting sort of effect on me. Reminds me of the soft lights you see in certain of the old masters. And since we have to keep our voices low, the light seems right for it.

Yes. I want to talk; I want to spill a lot of things that never came out at my trial. Tomorrow, I'll just be a few lines of type in the newspapers—"Thor Holderson, convicted of the murder of Jacob Bachman, went to his death in the electric chair at Walden Prison this morning at 5:55 a.m.," and so on. But before I go, I want at least one man to know the whole story.

Do you believe in occult matters, warden? Or do you believe only in powers that you, yourself, possess? This story may be a little—frightening. Of course, it's not fearsome to me, but then, I've been all through it, and I'm not easily scared. You'll remember a week ago, when Guido Caseletti got it? You know how everyone else in Death Row pulled the usual stereotyped demonstration—the eerie wailing, the muffled beating on the walls, when the lights went dim and the hum of the generators went up from out there past the little green door? Hell, warden, if you'll check up, you can find that *I* didn't blow *my* top. I *laughed*.

SEEMS strange, doesn't it, when Guido and his mother did their best to help me at my trial? Well, that's part of the story.

Funny how Guido went to the chair for killing his mother. And I don't mean peculiar, I mean funny. Laughable, I mean. To you, that seems callous, I'm sure, but you must remember, warden, I'm a product of Hell's Kitchen, and a convicted murderer to boot.

Have some more candy, warden. Very delicious stuff. My girl made it. I guess I mentioned that.

Yes, we have few pleasures here in Death Row. But I can assure you, when Guido burned, I felt a happiness that was out of this world.

So you're no student of the occult? That means, of course, that you don't believe in anything you can't see, or can't explain, or have explained to you by the cut-and-dried rules by which you live.

Warden, do me one courtesy. Don't insult my integrity by concluding that I'm acting crazy in order to play for a last-minute reprieve. And please don't insult my intelligence by concluding that I really am crazy. I know it's too late for the governor to do anything, even if you phoned him now. And I'm as sane as you are.

I *COULD* be crazy, warden; believe me, I could be crazy, what I've seen in the past six months.

Warden, here in Death Row, I've thought a lot about the reality of the life we lead, and its dullness when you compare it with the tremendously more vital reality of the dreams we dream. Maybe it's a form of escapism, a sort of mystical sour grapes, but I firmly believe that the life my mind lives outside my body is a thousand times more intense and stirring than the dull and stupid life that the two of them—soul and body—live together.

Honestly, now, did you ever kiss a woman in real life that gave you the terrible, beautiful passion you've had from women in your dreams? Have you ever enjoyed one triumph in life that measured up to the nobility of your victories when you sleep? If more people thought of such matters, maybe they wouldn't make such a grim struggle of hanging on to life.

Of course, the terror of dreams is greater than the terrors of living—at least some say so. But you could, if you tried, imagine

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some terrors that would make the hideous stuff of dreams seem pallid by comparison. I like to imagine such things, here in this rather oppressive lonesomeness that's the Death Row at Walden.

Suppose—just let your mind run on it a minute—suppose you looked in a mirror one day, and saw someone else. Just think about it. Simple thing—you pull yourself up to a mirror, expecting to see a familiar, if disappointing face, and it's someone else. Warden, that's a real soul-shaker, isn't it?

Think of it. You've seen the same face all your life. To be sure, time has altered it, but so subtly that it's hardly noticeable. As a child, you played with that image, laughed at it, made faces at it. As a young man, you checked it carefully for blemishes and for the first faint crawl of beard that proved your manhood, and scanned it anxiously when you went on your first dates with girls. And when you were grown up, occasionally you stared at it bitterly, realizing that in spite of yourself, the face and the man behind it were growing older. Sometimes, after a bad night, you've looked at it reluctantly, your nerves a-jangle, and the signs of exhaustion and dissipation have made it seem almost like a stranger's face. But at least, with all its faults, it was still *your* face.

But suppose, some day when you had such a hangover, and your nerves were practically on the outside of your skin, you faced up to a mirror and the image that looked back, and imitated your every move, was not you, but someone else?

Here, move just a little, so you can see my face. I want you to see that I'm as calm and quiet as my voice—that my eyes are steady, and my face placid. You *must not* believe I'm crazy. But warden, I looked in a mirror once, and Guido Caseletti looked back.

I knew Guido Caseletti and his mother all my life. He was a little older than I, and wiser, and stronger. So I admired him. His mother, too. She was young, vital, beautiful. That alone was enough to make her unusual, in a poverty-ridden slum where most women are old at thirty, toothless hags at forty, and dead at fifty. My mother, thank God, died when she was thirty, and missed the worst of the life I knew.

AND it was Guido's mother who gave me the only taste of what a home might be. She went out working, to take care of herself and her son, like most other mothers where we lived. But where the other women came back haggard from their night's work charring in office buildings, or their day's work in factory or laundry, Guido's mother came back—well, radiant—as though her life and vitality had somehow been renewed.

Their home was luxurious, sinfully luxurious, by our standards. There was food in greater abundance than most of us knew, and there was—knowledge. I have the fortune, or misfortune, to be better educated than most Hell's Kitchen boys, wouldn't you say? Well, I got my education from the books in Guido's home, and from Guido's mother. She was not only educated, she was intelligent.

I've seen her stop and pass a few words with an occasional professor from the big college a few blocks over, when they'd come venturing down to Hell's Kitchen to sit in the sunlit park that had more tradition than beauty to recommend it. And I've seen their faces actually troubled and puzzled after a few such passages, and Guido's mother, her head on one side, laughing at their amazement like a naughty child.

And once, when I was sick—she picked me up in the gutter, outside Jacob Bachman's drug store—she gave orders to Bachman with more authority and sureness than any young interne from City Hospital.

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Snapped out a prescription in what must have been Latin, and old Jake filled it automatically, looking at her with respect and wonder. Oh, she was a smart woman, a tremendously brilliant, bold, beautiful woman.

Of course, you understand that my real intimacy with Guido only began this last year or so, but I was in and out of their house a thousand times as I grew up.

Guido was a queer one. He had the same inner strength, and the confidence that came from it, as his mother. It would have made him a leader in any of the gangs in our old Hell's Kitchen. You were in the cops in those days; you know what those gangs were like. To be a leader in such a gang meant money and power. But Guido didn't want to be a leader. He stayed aloof, usually having only one close friend, and their goings and comings were matters of great interest and speculation, simply because Guido, rather than the pals he had, commanded our attention.

He was a sort of idol to us younger kids, certainly to me, and you can imagine how proud I was when he suddenly picked me for his close friend. Pat Driscoll had been thick with Guido, and you remember the terrible, tragic thing that happened to him —how he was found, shot to pieces by the watchman in Hobart's warehouse, with the watchman dead, too. They claim the rest of the gang got away with a hundred thousand in furs—sables and mink and ermine. And Pat's death had been hard on Guido. I remember the tears in his great, dark eyes, and the strangeness in his face, as though he couldn't understand such things. Because, you see, Guido was never mixed up in any rough stuff. The cop on that beat had actually sat in Guido's mother's kitchen during the time the robbery was committed, with Guido asleep in a chair. Not that anyone suspected Guido anyhow; it was just routine to question him, since Pat and he had been so close.

And I loved being Guido's close friend, for it brought me into his home even more, where I could see and talk to his mother.

Here, warden, have some more candy. Angela Caseletti—that's Guido's mother—used to make candy like this for me. My girl, who brings it here to Walden, is an Italian, too.

Angela used to sit and talk to me, there in that old kitchen, with the single yellow bulb, and the brown shadows playing in the corners, just like this cell is this minute.

"Oh, they were kind to me, Guido and his mother.

The things I went through in my boyhood there in Hell's Kitchen—well, you'll understand, because you were in the cops once, yourself, and you saw the rough side.

I was there at their home the night of—the killing. Old Jake Bachman's killing, I mean, the one I was convicted for. I felt nervous, because the gang had been in some trouble with Bachman, and I was in on it. You see, I still ran with the gang, although Guido didn't. When he was away, now and then, I'd hang around at Bachman's with the gang. He didn't like it, naturally. Did you ever know an old drug-store man who liked a bunch of no-good loafers hanging around, stealing candy and cigarettes, keeping good customers scared away?

I don't know why it happened that I had trouble with Bachman. To give myself credit, I was the least tough of the bunch, and he and I had always been fairly friendly. But he'd threatened me that day, and I had a feeling—but you don't believe in the occult, warden, so you wouldn't believe in premonitions, of course.

More candy? Eat it all, once you get started it's hard to stop; I won't be needing any after tomorrow. Not funny, huh? Sorry, I guess that is a little morbid.

WELL, anyhow, there we sat that night, and Guido's mother must have sensed my nervousness and my melancholy. She

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was so attentive and so bent on helping me that she actually had no time for Guido. She made me some of this candy, and talked to me, soothingly, in that quiet voice of hers. Once, when Guido moved in the shadows, she actually ordered him out of the room.

We drank a little, a few glasses of sour, brackish Dago Red, and after awhile I felt sleepy. My nervousness was gone, and the let-down of the tension just folded me up. She understood. I remember she called me "poor boy," and led me into Guido's room. Stood there just like a mother, while I peeled down to my underwear, and after I was in bed, she tucked me in.

Warden, that was the worst night of my life. I woke up, very late. The room was so black it seemed thicker than air, and more oppressive. The sounds were all gone from the street down below. The gassy smell from the river came drifting in as it always does with the late mists, and it just simply *felt* late. And there in that dark I lay, with my heart pounding, feeling that something was terribly wrong, feeling torn to pieces, with a strangeness and a pull on my nerves and mind that was stranger and more terrible than anything I had ever felt in my life.

Somehow, I got up and stumbled to the light switch. My feet felt funny, and in the strangeness of Guido's room, I gashed my shins against a chair, but the pain, while intense, didn't feel like any pain I'd known before. And there was a separation of detail in the pain, as though the moment of its happening was hours long. I felt the flesh being opened, and the bite of the sharp wood on bone, and then the pain started, but with it and overlying it, I could even feel the little drops of blood well out and gather, and slide down the skin of my legs. And all this time, that dreadful feeling of strangeness was like a living panic in my mind.

Somehow, I got the light on, and seeing the familiar planes and surfaces and shadows of Guido's room, that hard knot in my breast relaxed, and I lost a fraction of the animal fear that was lifting the hairs on my neck. Then I turned to the mirror.

Warden, *it was not I in that mirror; it was Guido*. Now wait, don't say it was imagination, the result of drunkenness, or bad light. The light in that room was as bright as the one the cops kept in my face the next day. The mirror was fine plate glass, because the Caseletti's had nothing but the best in their home. Guido, you will remember, was half a head taller than I am, bigger all over, and he was dark where I am fair. It was not a mistake. The man in the mirror was Guido.

Think it over, warden. You're sick and shaken and weighted with a fear that is sub-human. You wake in a strange room, turn on the light, and—the face in the mirror isn't yours.

They can talk about witches and werewolves and warlocks and vampires. They can load it up with the fancy writing of a Poe or a Stevenson. If you're reading it alone at night, with the proper accompaniments of wind and creaking shutters and rain, such things can give the imaginative quite a little thrill.

But if you want your mind to shrink into a tight, hard little ball, and go cringing into a skull-corner in a fear that's the same size and shape as death, just try the plain, everyday action of looking into a mirror, and seeing another person looking back at you. Would it hit you hard?

I tell you what it did to me. I fainted. Yes, fainted like a girl. I must have. Because when I came to, I was on the floor in Guido's room, still only half-conscious, and standing above me, talking to Guido's mother, was—*me*.

Yes, me, but nothing like the me I had always known. My clothes were bloody, there was a deep gash down the side of my face (I could see all this, through half-

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closed eyes) and I was talking in a quick, nervous voice—*my* voice—to Guido's mother.

BUT that woman who talked to the person that was me, even while I lay there, she wasn't the Angela Caseletti I had known, the calm and beautiful woman who had talked to me so quietly and kindly.

Her gorgeous olive skin was sallow, and mottled with crimson spots, the flush of a rage more violent than even a Hell's Kitchen boy had ever seen. The cords in her neck stood out as though she were carrying a great weight on her back, and her arms were curved up in such a frenzy that the tendons at the wrist looked like wires.

I was close to fainting again. If I had been so fully conscious that I could have grasped all this—*me,* standing there while I also lay half-conscious on the floor—*me,* talking to a sane woman turned suddenly into a nightmarish fury—I think I would have died. But every sense in me was so shaken that I could only lie there, unmoving, and almost unfeeling.

I remember her saying, in a voice that vibrated like the whip of electricity when you touch an open socket accidentally—"You fool, you didn't give him enough!"

Have some more candy, warden? Well, it's rather rich; it's easy to get enough.

And I remember *me,* laughing back at her, reckless and crazy—that *me* who stood there—and saying: "The old fool had more blood in him than a hog. It was beautiful, mother!"

Well, warden, you know how they found me at Guido's—passed out, with my clothes stiff with blood, and that gash on my cheek. They found skin tissue from my cheek under old Jake Bachman's fingernails. Not that they needed all that scientific horseplay to send me to the chair. After all, ten people had seen me shoot old Jake down—ten people who had known me all my life.

And they saw me stuffing the money from his old money-can into my pockets.

Of course, you know they never found the money. Some said it was two thousand dollars.

Warden, that's very funny. It was more like twenty thousand, I found out later.

You'll remember how I went through the trial like an automaton? I couldn't remember—things. My mind would come whirling up to the edges of a dark dream, and then I guess it was the common-sense of instinctive caution that swept it back. My mind, automatically refusing to think about anything so dreadful.

You'll remember how I accepted a public defender, and went through the motions of pleading not guilty, and the farce of a trial. I couldn't think. Even when the judge finally called on me to stand up for sentence, my mind was numbed. I knew it had been a quick trial. I knew that, of all the people I knew, only Guido and Angela Caseletti had tried to help me.

But when that judge had finished his dirty little chore, and ended with the stereotyped, hypocritical invocation: "and may God have mercy on your soul!" I began to think. Because at that moment, Guido stretched his legs out straight, and then brought them back again, and his trousers hitched up above his socks. That's when I saw the black scabs of those two deep cuts across the shins. And I remembered that night, and how *I* had felt the pain of those cuts. And I remembered all that had happened.

I guess everyone still recalls that preposterous attempt I made to escape, and the almost unbelievable fact that I got away. That in itself made a bigger story than old Jake's murder, or—what will happen tomorrow.

And one reason I made the escape good was the fact that I came right back to

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Hell's Kitchen, where no sane man would have gone, back to Guido and his mother. I kept my eyes away from that woman—I was afraid of the depths of knowledge in her eyes—but I asked them for help, and they gave me money to get to the coast.

THE coast, hell! I was never more than a mile from them. And in two months, as soon as my beard had grown, I came back and rented the room above their kitchen. That's where I wanted to be. There were some things I needed to learn.

I knew their kitchen like the palm of my hand. I knew where they sat, and where they wouldn't look, and I bored a hole through the floor of my room, taking care to open just a pin-point in their ceiling so I could see all they did.

You don't believe in the occult, warden? Well, that's your privilege. But there are strange and unfathomable hiding places in the Italian spirit. And there are strange knowledges in those craggy Italian mountains where civilization began, so long ago.

I found out how Guido had entered my body, and I had been put into his.

You know how dreams are. How a *you* not of the body goes adventuring into lands that are strange and beautiful, with companions never seen in this life, but somehow more familiar than the people you touch and love and talk to? You know how, at such times, another world is easier to believe in than our own world. There is this *you*, then, which is obviously not of the body, but as real—perhaps even more real than your known self. Would you call it the soul? Whatever we call it, we know it exists.

The preachers say that the body is only a shell, to be laid aside some bright day, a machine that wears out, a suit of flesh that clothes the spirit.

And all that had happened to me was that Guido and his mother had arranged it so that his spirit and mine had changed clothes—for the time it took to murder and rob Jacob Bachman.

I learned how that was done. It was very simple. It's a matter of achieving a tranquility in another man, you can make the transfer of your soul into his fleshly envelope. It's quite simple—a drug that is little known but easy to get—undisturbed quiet, in a light that is neutral, not too bright—and the rhythmic drumming of quiet, monotonous talk. Not hypnotism, something simpler and greater.

I learned how it was done. Who else do you think killed Guido's mother? Guido? Don't be silly, warden, nodding your head in that odd fashion. Listen to me; you can still hear quite well, I know. Guido loved his mother. And besides, hadn't she made him rich, with no work on his part, and little or no danger?

Do you remember that Pat Driscoll was killed in Hobart's, while Guido slept at home? Yes, but a hundred thousand in furs had disappeared before Pat died. And I have seen Angela Caseletti wrapped in sables worth a fortune, strutting alone in her vanity, while I watched from that pinhole in the ceiling of her kitchen.

Do you remember Banco Gordon? Do you remember how he cut old man Severance's throat, and took a double handful of diamonds out of his pocket? Those stones drifted back into the market, so cleverly that the cops never got close to what happened. But there was one giant star ruby that never showed up. I have seen that ruby on Angela Caseletti's finger.

There was a box, a common bread box, in their kitchen. In it was Jake Bachman's twenty thousand dollars, and ten times that much from other crimes that men died for, fighting off the cops, or here in the electric chair at Walden. Pat Driscoll had been Guido's friend, and so had Banco Gordon. So had Dave Wallis, and Ty Cardwin, and Toots Moscovitz, and Legs Arrigoni. You

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remember them all, and how they died, some under the guns, and some here at Walden.

And what they died for, all of it, was in that bread box of Guido's mother's—a neat little fortune to keep them safe from harm. Now, the money's in another, safer place.

No, warden, Guido would never kill the mother he loved, and who had made him safe and comfortable and rich.

BUT still, he *was* seen sneaking out of the house early in the morning of the day she was found dead. Mrs. Moreni saw him slip out, and saw him drop something in the deep grass at the alley. And Mrs. Erickson saw him, wild-eyed and bloody, coming back upstairs. And after all, the axe they found in the grass had Guido's fingerprints all over it. I took care of all that.

And I took care that he was found, unconscious, beside her. Of course, he claimed no knowledge of it. Perhaps he had none. I'd given him plenty of the stuff. But there he was, and there she was, murdered. His dumb stare couldn't back up his claim of insanity. Matricide is a pretty ugly crime. Juries don't like it.

I knew that Angela would never let anyone but Guido get near enough to harm her. But remember, I knew her secret. I watched her make that candy. The drug's more palatable in candy, this particular kind of candy, with the odd taste. But it's acceptable in wine, and Guido liked wine. You take good claret, and the drug just gives it a brackish, puckery taste, like cheap Dago Red.

It was easy to get Guido to drink; I just slipped down and left an open bottle where he'd find it, one day when his mother had gone out. And the rest—the quiet, the light, the drumming of monotonous talk, they were easy.

I'll never forget how she walked right up to me, so unsuspecting. She laid her hand on Guido's hair, and kissed the back of Guido's neck, and all the time, Guido lay in his room, in my body. "Dear," she called me; "dear," and "heart of my heart."

Then I turned, and she saw my eyes, and—the axe.

I gave myself up shortly after Guido was convicted and sentenced. Not just because I wanted to be here and see the lights go dim and hear the other dead-to-be howling in their cells. Naturally, I didn't want to miss that, but I had other reasons.

You see, I had now really committed a murder, and somehow, I felt like expiating it. I had been sentenced to burn for a murder Guido had committed. That wasn't good. Now, he had burned for a killing I had done. Somehow, it seemed like justice that I should die, too.

But the more I've thought about it, the less I like the idea. After all, I did the world a service in killing that woman. I'm as good a citizen as you are, warden, and maybe better, from what I've heard of you, and the various frame-ups you've gotten away with. It doesn't seem right for me to die, warden.

WALDEN, October—Thor Holderson, youthful gangster who was convicted of the brutal murder of Jacob Bachman six months ago, went to his death in the electric chair at Walden Prison at 6:02 this morning. Holderson, who had been stoical during his trial and confinement, broke down completely before his execution. Either in real or feigned frenzy, he struggled with guards until given a sedative, insisting that he was the warden of the penitentiary.

Warden James Golz, whose nerves have been shaken by the recent, unprecedented number of electrocutions, announced today that he plans to resign in the near future.

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# The Beasts of Barsac

*By ROBERT BLOCH*

**Heading by JOHN GIUNTA**

IT WAS twilight when Doctor Jerome reached the ogre's castle. He moved through the fairy-tale land of a child's picture book; a realm of towering mountain crags, steeply slanting roads ascending to forbidden heights, and clouds that hovered like bearded wraiths watching his progress from on high.

The castle itself was built of dream-stuff. Nightmare qualities predominated in the great grey bulk, rearing its crumbling battlements against a sullen, blood-streaked sky. A chill wind sang its weird welcome as Doctor Jerome advanced towards the castle on the hilltop, and an autumn moon rose above the topmost tower.

As the moon stared down on man and castle alike, a black cloud burst from the ruined battlements and soared squeaking to the sky. Bats, of course. The final touch of fantasy.

Doctor Jerome shrugged and trudged across weed-choked flagstones in the castle courtyard until he reached the great oaken door.

Now to raise the iron knocker . . . the door would swing open slowly, on creaking hinges . . . the tall, gaunt figure would emerge. . . . "Greetings, stranger. I am Count Dracula!"

Doctor Jerome grinned. "Like hell," he muttered.

For the whole fantasy collapsed when he thought of Sebastian Barsac. This might be an ogre's castle, but Barsac was no ogre.

Nine years ago, at the Sorbonne, he'd made friends with shy, fat little Barsac. Since then they had taken different paths—but it was impossible for Doctor Jerome to imagine his old companion as the ideal tenant of a haunted castle.

Not that Barsac didn't have some queer ideas. He'd always been a little eccentric, and his theories on biological research were far from orthodox—but Jerome could bank on one thing. Barsac was too fat to be a vampire, and too indolent to become a werewolf.

Still, there was something strange about this invitation, coming after a three years' lapse in correspondence. Merely a scribbled note, suggesting that Doctor Jerome come down for a month or so to look over experimental data—but that was Barsac's usual way of doing things.

Ordinarily, Doctor Jerome would ignore such a casual offer, but right now it came as a life-saver. For Doctor Jerome was strapped. He'd been let out of the Foundation, he owed three installments on his rent, and he had—literally—no place to lay his head. By pawning the remnants of his precious equipment he'd managed to cross the Channel and reach Castle Barsac. A month in a real castle with his old friend—it might lead to *something*.

So Jerome had seized Opportunity before the echo of its knocking had died away. And now he banged the iron knocker, watched the castle door swing open. It *did* squeak, a bit.

Footsteps. A shadow. And then—

"Delighted to see you!" Sebastian Barsac embraced his friend in the French fashion and began to make Gallic noises of enthusiasm.

"Welcome to Castle Barsac," said the little man. "You are tired after your long march from the railroad station, no? I will show you to your room—servants I do not retain. And after a shower we shall talk. Yes?"

UP THE winding stairs, pursued by a babble of incoherent conversation, Doctor Jerome toiled, bags in hand. He found his oak-panelled chambers, was instructed in the mysteries of the antique mechanical



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*Old Barsac was too fat to be a vampire, too indolent to become a werewolf—but there are other things!*



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shower arrangement; then was left to bathe and dress.

He had no time to marshal his impressions. It was not until later—after a surprisingly good dinner in a small apartment downstairs—that Jerome was able to sit back and appraise his host.

They retired to a parlor, lit cigars, and sat back before the grateful warmth emanating from the stone fireplace, where a blaze rose to push back the shadows in the room. Doctor Jerome's fatigue had lifted, and he felt stimulated, alert.

As Sebastian Barsac began to discuss his recent work, Jerome took the opportunity to scrutinize his friend.

LITTLE BARSAC had aged, definitely. He was fat, but flabby rather than roly-poly. The dark hair had receded on his domed forehead, and his myopic eyes peered from spectacles of increased thickness. Despite verbal enthusiasm, the little lord of Castle Barsac seemed oddly languid in his physical movements. But from his talk, Doctor Jerome recognized that Barsac's spirit was unchanged.

The words began to form a pattern in Jerome's mind—a pattern holding a meaning he did not understand.

"So you can see what I have been doing these nine years past. All of my life since I left the Sorbonne has been devoted to one end—discovering the linkage between man and animal through the alteration of cell-structure in the brain. It is an evolutionary process, this thing I seek—an evolutionary process wherein the cycle occurs in the life-span of the individual animal. And my key? My key is simple. It lies in the recognition of one fact—that the human soul is divisible."

"What is all this?" Doctor Jerome interrupted. "I don't see what you're driving at, Barsac. Where's the connection between biology, alteration of cell-structure in the brain, and evolution? And what part does a divisible human soul play in all this?"

"I will be blunt, my friend. I believe that human characteristics can be transferred to animals by means of mechanical hypnosis. I believe that portions of the human soul essence or psyche can be transmitted from man to animal—and that the animal will then begin to ascend the evolutionary scale. In a word, the animal will show *human* characteristics."

Doctor Jerome scowled.

"In the nine years that you've been dabbling in this unscientific romanticism here in your castle retreat, a new word has come into being to describe your kind, Barsac," he said. "The word is 'screwball.' And that's what I think of you, and that's what I think of your theory."

"Theory?" Barsac smiled. "It is *more* than a theory."

"It's preposterous!" Jerome interrupted. "To begin with, your statement about the human soul being divisible. I defy you to *show* me a human soul, let alone prove that you can cut it in half."

"I cannot show you one, I grant," said Barsac.

"Then what about your mechanical hypnosis? I've never heard it explained."

"I cannot explain it."

"And what, in an animal, *are* human characteristics? What is your basis of measurement?"

"I do not know."

"Then how do you expect me to understand your ideas?"

Sebastian Barsac rose. His face was pale, despite the fire's ruddy glow.

"I cannot show you a human soul," he murmured, "but I can show you what happens to animals when they possess part of one.

"I cannot explain mechanical hypnosis, but I can show you the machine I use to hypnotize myself and the animals in order to transfer a portion of my soul.

"I cannot measure the human characteristics of the animals undergoing my treatment, but I can show you what they look like and let you judge.

"Even then you may not *understand* my ideas—but you will see that I am actually carrying them out!"

By this time, Doctor Jerome had also risen to his feet. "You mean you've been transferring your soul to an animal body?"

Sebastian Barsac shrugged. "I have been transferring *part* of what I *call* my soul to the bodies of many animals," he amended.

"But you can't—it's biologically impossible. It defies the laws of Reality!"

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BEHIND the bulging spectacles, Barsac's eyes gleamed oddly.

"What is Reality and who makes its laws?" he mocked. "Come, and see for yourself the success of my experiments."

He led the way across the chamber, down the hall, and up the great circular staircase. They reached the second floor on which Jerome's room lay, but did not pause. Selecting a panel switch from the open box on the wall, Barsac threw it and illumined the upper stairs. They began to climb again.

And all the while Barsac was talking, talking. "You have seen the gods of ancient Egypt?" he said. "The anthropomorphic stone figures with the bodies of men and the heads of animals? You have heard the legend of the werewolf, of lycanthropic changes whereby man becomes beast and beast becomes man?

"Fables, all fables. And yet behind the fables lurked a truth. The truth lurks no longer, for I have found it. The seat of evolution lies in the soul, and in the soul's human instrument of expression, the brain. We have grafted cellular structures of one body onto another—why not graft portions of one soul to another? Hypnosis is the key to transference, as I have said.

"All this I have learned by much thought, much experimentation. I have worked for nine years, perfecting techniques and methodology. Many times I failed. To my laboratory I have brought animals, thousands of animals. Many of them died. And I procured others, working endlessly towards one goal. I have paid the price, myself, dying a thousand mental deaths with the failure of each mistaken attempt. Even a physical price I have paid. A monkey—*sale cochon!*—took from me my finger. So."

Barsac paused and held up his left hand in a dramatic gesture to reveal the stump where his left thumb was missing.

Then he smiled. "But it is not my wounds of battle I wish to display to you—it is the fruits of victory. "Come."

They had reached the topmost tower at last. Doctor Jerome gazed down the dizzying spiral of the stairs they had ascended, then turned his head forward as Barsac unlocked the panelled door of his laboratory and gestured him inside.

The click of a wall-switch heralded the coming of light. Doctor Jerome entered and stood dazzled in the doorway.

Set in the mouldering tower of the old castle was a spacious, white-tiled, completely modern laboratory unit. A great outer room, filled with electrical equipment, was displayed before him. All of the appurtenances necessary to micro-biology were ranged on shelves and cabinets.

"Does it please you, Jerome?" asked Barsac. "It was not easy to assemble this, no. The very tiles were transported up the steep mountain passways to the castle, and the shipping of each bit of equipment was costly. But behold—is it not a perfect spot in which to work?"

DOCTOR JEROME nodded, absently. His inward thoughts were tinged with definite envy. Barsac here was squandering his genius and his wealth on this crazy dabbling, and he had every scientific luxury at his command, While he, Jerome, a capable scientist with a sound outlook, had nothing; no job, no future, nothing to work with. It wasn't right, it wasn't just. And yet—

"Even an electrical plant," Barsac was exclaiming. "We manufacture our own power here, you see. Look around. All is of the finest! Or perhaps you are eager to see what I promised to show you?"

Doctor Jerome nodded again. He couldn't stand the sight of this spotless laboratory because of the jealousy it aroused. He wanted to get it over with, get out of here.

Now Barsac opened the door of a second room, beyond. It was nearly as large as the first, but the walls were untiled. The original castle stones lent startling contrast to the great gleaming metal cabinet which dominated the center of the chamber.

"This room I had not the heart to change," Barsac explained. "It is here, according to family tradition, that my great-great grandfather conducted his experiments in alchemy. He was a sorceror."

"So is his great-great grandson," Doctor Jerome murmured.

"You refer to the machine?" Barsac stepped over and opened the metal door in the side of the cabinet. Within the large exposed area was a chair, fastened with clamps from which led a number of convoluted tubes and metal valves which in

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turn were fastened to a switchboard bearing an imposing number of dials and levers.

THE chair faced a glass prism—a window in the metal that had the general appearance of a gigantic lense. Before this prism was a wheel of radiating wires, so fine as to be almost transparent. Various tubes from the chair led to the tips of the wires at different points of the wheel-rim.

"This is not magic but science," Barsac said. "You see before you the mechanical hypnotic device I have perfected. The human subject is seated in the chair, so. The attachments are made, the adjustments calculated. The cabinet is closed. The power is turned on—to be automatically generated for a time-span set beforehand. The subject gazes into the prism. The wires before the prism revolve and various arcs are actuated across its surface. Mechanical hypnosis results—and then, by means of electrical impulse, something of the life-essence, the soul itself, is released. It flows through the glass prism, a vital force, and impinges upon the animal subjects set before the cabinet in the focal range of the glass. The animals receive the essence and—change. The transference is complete. Something of the human goes into the animals. By graduating the focal range I can work with a dozen animals at once. Naturally, each experiment drains my strength and taxes my vitality."

"It taxes my credulity," Doctor Jerome interjected.

Barsac shrugged dolefully. "Very well. I could explain minutely the workings of my machine, but I see you demand visual proof of its work. Come with me."

The third door was opened and Doctor Jerome stood in the last chamber.

It was hot in here, and a sharp scent smote his nostrils. An animal reek permeated the bare room. Lining the walls were cages—dozens of cages. Some held rats, some white mice, and there was tier upon tier of glass containers housing guinea pigs. Rats squealed, mice squeaked, and guinea pigs chittered.

"Experimental subjects," Barsac commented. "Alas, the supply is continuously being exhausted. I work on batches of twenty or more at once. You see, not all animals are—responsive—to the treatment. Out of one batch I could hope for two or three—reactions. That is, until recently. Then I began to find that almost all of my subjects showed changes."

Barsac moved towards the fourth wall, where no cages loomed. Here were shelves filled with jars. Preserving jars. Doctor Jerome decided.

He moved closer for another look, but Barsac turned. He halted him, left hand on Jerome's shoulder, so that Doctor Jerome looked down upon the trembling stump where the thumb had been.

"Before I show you this," he whispered, "are you sure that you will not be shocked? I do not wish to startle you unduly."

"Let me see," muttered Doctor Jerome.

"I shall only permit you to gaze upon the last experiments," Barsac whispered. "I could show you dogs with human legs, mice with human skulls and no tails, monkeys that are hairless and possessed of human faces. But you would mock at me and say they were freaks, hybrids—or tell me I could produce monstrosities by using infra-red or gamma rays.

"So I shall show you my last experimental results only. The ones that prove not only that human characteristics can be transferred to animals—but that *my* characteristics have been transferred. The transference of my *mental* powers cannot be measured. I shall let you judge the *physical* results only.

"Perhaps they will not excite you very much, these creatures of mine. They are not as grotesque as the earlier ones, but the reproduction of an *exact* characteristic excites me more than the semi-anthropomorphic structures in the earlier bodies. It shows me that I am on the right track at last. My next step will produce not creatures that are changed and dead, but creatures changed and living. I—"

"Show me!" Doctor Jerome commanded.

"You will not be impressed." Barsac insisted. "They are only rats and you may not even notice—"

"Show me!"

"Then, look."

Barsac stepped aside and Doctor Jerome gazed down at the jars. The bodies of twenty rats floated in the preserving fluid. Jerome stared. They were rats and only rats

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—their dead grey bodies were unchanged. Barsac was mad, quite mad.

And then Doctor Jerome saw it. He stared at one rat and saw the left forepaw that was not a forepaw—but a tiny dessicated hand!

He stared at the other rats in the other jars and saw that each left forepaw was alike. Each forepaw was like a human hand —*like the left hand of Sebastian Barsac on which the thumb was missing!*

2.

SOMETHING was climbing the ivy outside the castle walls. Something was peering through the castle window—peering with little red-rimmed eyes that held a light of gleeful and atrocious gloating. Something chuckled as it scrambled through the open window and dropped to the floor of the castle bedroom on tiny paws; paws that scraped and padded as they advanced towards the great bed.

Suddenly Jerome felt it crawling up the counterpane. He writhed and twisted, striking out with his hands to dislodge it; but the creature crawled upwards, and now he could hear it chuckling in a voice that was a shrill mockery of human laughter.

Then its head rose on a level with Jerome's eyes, and he saw it—saw the furry figure, the monkeylike body and the mannikin-head of a witch's familiar—saw and recognized the hideous little monster for what it was . . . an animal, but with Barsac's face!

He screamed, then, and knew without any further indication that the creature was not alone.

The room was full of them. They were crawling out of the shadows in the corners, they were creeping along the panelling of the walls; they crowded through the door and slithered through rat-holes in the worm-riddled flooring.

They were all about him now, chattering and squealing as they climbed towards him.

Then through the door came the man-sized figures; the man-sized figures with the shaggy bodies and flaming eyes and the acrid scent of the werewolf seeping forth from between their carrion fangs. And beneath their shaggy bodies was the flesh and form of Barsac, and within their flaming eyes was the laughing gaze of Barsac, and Jerome recognized them for what they were and screamed again.

But screaming did not stop them. Nothing stopped them as the mannikin-horde and the wolf-horde flowed in a furry flood towards his writhing body on the bed. He felt the touch of their horrid paws everywhere, tensed himself for the moment when he would feel their claws, their jaws—

A shriek wrenched from his throat as Jerome sat bolt upright in the bed.

Moonlight streamed tranquilly through the castle window, and its bright pattern was etched upon a bare floor and unshadowed walls.

The creatures were gone. They had never existed, save in his own disordered dreams.

Doctor Jerome sighed and dropped back as the hot perspiration trickled down into his eyes. He drifted off to sleep again.

It seemed to him as though the oaken door opened as he slept, and Barsac crept into the room. The little fat man was smiling a secret smile as he advanced on the bed. In his arms he held a rabbit—a white rabbit. He stroked the furry head until the ears lay flat and the pink-rimmed eyes were open and alert. Then Barsac's eyes opened and he gazed on Jerome and he fixed Jerome's gaze with unshakable intensity. Barsac's bulging eyes held a command and a ghastly promise, and Jerome could not turn away. Barsac's very being seemed concentrated in his eyes, and as he stared, Jerome felt his own being rise to meet that ghastly gaze.

He felt himself flowing out . . . out . . . and somehow he knew that he was no longer staring at Barsac but at the white rabbit. The white rabbit was absorbing his personality through the hypnotic stare.

Jerome felt weak, giddy. His head reeled, and through a blurred mist he saw the figure of the white rabbit. The white rabbit was *growing*. The furry body was larger. It slipped out of Barsac's hands and crouched on the floor, looming upwards as it swelled and grew.

Its long white ears were melting into a skull that in itself was changing. The pink muzzle blended back into the face. The rabbit's eyes were moving farther apart and a

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mouth sprang into prominence above a suddenly protruding chin. The rabbit had a *face*.

There was something terribly familiar about the rabbit's face. Jerome strove to cleanse his mind of loathing and concentrate upon recognition. He had seen that face before and he knew that he *must* remember whose it was.

Then, in a wave of supreme terror, he recognized the face upon the rabbit.

It was *his own*—

3.

DOCTOR JEROME didn't tell Barsac about his dreams. But Barsac must have noted his pallor and the dark pouches under his eyes, and drawn his own conclusions.

"I fear my accommodations are not of the best," he said, over the breakfast table. "It is my hope that you will soon become accustomed to the simple life. After we begin working together, things will probably adjust themselves, no?"

"No," said Doctor Jerome. "And what makes you think I'm going to work with you?"

"But of course you are going to work with me, my friend," Barsac declared. "It was for this reason I asked you to come here. I appreciate your brilliance, my friend, and I need your talents badly here.

"I have waited for you before resuming my experiments so that we could complete the final steps together. I realize that you were shocked by what I showed you last night, but I trust your reason has prevailed over your emotions.

"Together we can carry this experiment to its ultimate conclusion. Up to now I have produced monstrosities—and then managed to reproduce my own physical characteristics in a group of animals. I can go further than that, I think. I have evolved a refinement of my technique. Using other animals than rats, I hope to make the changes and keep them alive.

"Then I can determine whether I have transmitted a portion of my *mind* as well as a force that changes the bodies to resemble me. You perceive the significance?"

Doctor Jerome did not look as though he perceived anything except a most unpleasant prospect. He shook his head slowly.

"I—I can't," he murmured.

"Wait, you misunderstand! I shall not ask you to submit to hypnosis if you do not wish to. I shall take that risk myself. All I desire is that you remain here and help to supervise the work, take notes, and act as a scientific witness to corroborate my findings."

"It's no use, Barsac." Doctor Jerome did not attempt to disguise the disgust that worked in his features. "I can't stand it—I won't set foot in that laboratory again."

Barsac clucked sympathetically. "You will get over your aversion," he predicted. "And, I hope, soon. For I shall now proceed with the last experiment. If it succeeds—and I know it will—you must be convinced. And if you are convinced, you can carry on alone."

"Carry on? Alone?"

Barsac lowered his head. The little fat man addressed the wall rather than his breakfast companion.

"Yes. I am not long for this earth, my friend. The doctors, they tell me of my heart. The strain of long experimentation has taken its toll. And this last one may well prove to be the end of further work, if not of my life itself. My vital energy is drained by the hypnosis. No, Jerome, a man cannot give of his soul and retain life for long."

Doctor Jerome stared at Barsac's earnest face. Barsac avoided his gaze and continued.

"That is why I invited you and asked you to consider working with me. When I die, I wish that you will carry on my work. For the sake of our friendship, and because of my respect for your abilities and brilliance. Have no fear, whether you choose to enter the laboratory or not, I have compiled all of the notes and data necessary for you to take over.

"And one thing more." Barsac's voice was quite faint. "I have made the other arrangements. I have seen my advocate and prepared my will. You will be left everything when I die; my entire estate goes to you to continue in this work."

Jerome rose. "It's no use," he said. "I won't go into that laboratory with you."

"Very well. I understand. But this I ask of you—please stay here with me during

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the next two days. I shall proceed at once with the operations I have in mind. I hope to be able to give you complete proof of success—living animals that will not only bear a physical resemblance to me, but inherit my mental processes as well."

Doctor Jerome shuddered slightly.

"Please," said Barsac. "Do not leave me during these next two days. I shall stay in the laboratory and work if you will prepare the meals. You understand, I cannot keep servants here. They are ignorant, superstitious fools—easily frightened. And I must have some one here to rely on. You will stay?"

Jerome was silent for a long moment. Then he nodded. "Yes," he whispered. "I will stay."

Barsac clasped his hand. Doctor Jerome felt the cold, flabby fingers and drew back involuntarily. To him, the light of gratitude in Barsac's bulging eyes was too reminiscent of the look he had glimpsed there in his dreams.

"I shall not wait," Barsac promised. "I go now to prepare. I will be in the laboratory—you need only to bring meals to the outer door. Within forty-eight hours I hope to announce success. Meanwhile, you are at liberty to amuse yourself as you will."

He turned. "I will leave you now. My gratitude, Jerome."

Barsac left the room.

Doctor Jerome smiled grimly as he gazed up at the forbidding stone ceiling.

"Amuse myself as I will," he muttered.

HE FINISHED his cigar, then rose and walked aimlessly down the hall. His footsteps rang eerily through the empty corridors. At a turn in the hall Jerome saw the figure standing against the wall in the shadows and started back.

Then he recognized the outlines of a suit of armor. Of course—Castle Barsac would have suits of armors. And all the trimmings, too. Perhaps he could amuse himself for a few hours, exploring the castle.

Doctor Jerome set about his explorations with scientific precision. He covered the ground floor thoroughly, entering a score of dusty chambers and apartments—being careful in each instance to turn on the lights before venturing into a strange room.

He found much to interest and delight him. Massive Regency furniture, elaborate tapestries, a full gallery of oils. The family portraits of the Barsac line gazed down austerely from a long chamber at the rear of the castle, and Jerome speculated as to the identity of that great-great grandfather with the sorcerous proclivities.

Everything hinted of great age and great wealth. If the castle was haunted, it was haunted by the past alone. Again Jerome was reminded of the story-book atmosphere. All that was needed was a family vault in the cellar.

A vault? Why not?

Jerome explored. He discovered the stairs that descended to the lower levels and here he found the catacombs.

Catacombs they were in truth. On marble slabs lay the stone sarcophagi of the Barsacs. Row on row they rested in eternal slumber here below. Now only Sebastian Barsac remained, the last of his line, and soon he too would join these ranks of the dead.

The last of the Barsacs, and he was mad. Mad and soon to die.

*How soon?*

There in the dank and silent catacombs, the thought came to Jerome.

He *could* die *quite* soon.

Why not? Let him die soon, and quietly.

Then there would no longer be a Castle Barsac. Jerome would have the castle, have the laboratory, have the money. And why not? Barsac was mad. And he was all alone. The doctors had said he would die, and it need hardly be called murder. Perhaps a strong shock would do it.

Yes, a shock. Barsac would weaken himself in these crazy experiments. And then it would be so easy to precipitate a stroke, a seizure. He could be frightened.

The will was made, and all that remained was the deed. Mad Barsac would lie here on the last empty slab, and it would be ended.

Doctor Jerome ascended the stairs slowly. He went out and walked through the hills, returning only at dusk. He had wrestled with temptation and put it aside. There was no thought of putting poison in the food he took upstairs at dinner. He left the tray outside the laboratory door and knocked. He descended quickly before Barsac opened

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the door, and ate a solitary supper in the great castle kitchen below.

He was resigned to waiting, now. After all, in a few weeks Barsac might die a natural death. Meanwhile, let his work go on. Perhaps he might succeed.

Jerome listened to the reveberation from the laboratory above his head. A steady humming sounded, accompanied by a rhythmic pulsing. Barsac must be in his cabinet now, working the focal prism and hypnotizing himself and his animals. Doctor Jerome wondered what sort of animals he was using in these "improved" experiments.

On second thought he didn't care to know. The vibrations were beginning to affect his nerves. He decided to turn in early. One more day and it would be over. If he could get a good night's sleep, now, his morbid fancies would vanish.

Accordingly, Jerome ascended to bed, switching off the lights as he proceeded down the hall. He undressed, donned pajamas, plunged the castle bedroom into darkness, and sought sleep.

Sleep came.

AND then Barsac came. He wheeled in the cabinet, the great metal cabinet, and once again his bright eyes caught and captured Jerome's astonished stare. Jerome's will slipped away and he entered the cabinet. He was clamped into the seat as a prisoner is clamped in the electric chair. Like a prisoner, Jerome knew he was facing the execution of a death-sentence. Yet his will was a prisoner—and now, as Barsac turned the dials, his soul was imprisoned too.

Jerome stared through the great glass prism that loomed before his eyes. He could not look away, for the gigantic lense was in itself a hypnotic agent, pulling at his retina, impelling him to gaze ahead into the hugely magnified world of the focal field. He waited for the animals to appear in the field—but there were no animals.

There was only Barsac. For suddenly a great face loomed through the glass—a monstrous face with the bulging eyes of Barsac, and the great domed forehead.

Barsac was smiling and his yellow teeth were exposed, but Jerome could only see the eyes. The eyes that glared and pulled at his own eyes, at his brain behind them. Pulled his being into the glass, for as the humming rose insanely about him, Doctor Jerome felt himself plunging forward. His body was clamped to the seat, but his soul soared through the weird prism and lost itself in Barsac's mad eyes—

Doctor Jerome awoke. It was daylight at last, but he did not sit up to greet its coming. He felt weak, drained.

*Drained.*

A dreadful suspicion was forming in Jerome's mind. He knew that he had dreamed—but he did not know what he hadn't dreamed. Could it be that there was a distorted truth in his symbolic nightmare?

Was Barsac lying to him? Perhaps his machine *could* drain some of the vital essence from a man's soul. Perhaps Barsac wanted him to assist in the experiments so that a part of his soul would be removed —not to be incorporated into animals, but into Barsac! Hypnotic, scientific vampirism!

Had Barsac been in this room last night while he slept and dreamed? Had Barsac hypnotized him in his sleep, seeking to snare his soul?

Something had happened. Jerome felt weak.

And then he was strong—strong with sudden purpose. The thoughts of yesterday came back, but they came now as a resolution.

He would kill Barsac, today.

He would kill him before he died himself. He would kill Barsac because he was a madman, because his experiments were blasphemous, because he deserved to die.

Doctor Jerome would kill Barsac for the sake of Science.

That was it. For the sake of Science.

Doctor Jerome rose, dressed, prepared breakfast, took Barsac's tray upstairs, returned to the castle chambers below, and began to plan anew.

Madman or genius, Barsac would die. He had to die. Suppose he were *really* doing what he claimed? Suppose he actually managed to create animals with human physical attributes and with human minds? Minds like Barsac's mind?

Wouldn't that be the ultimate horror? And shouldn't that horror be avoided, stamped out?

Of course. He, Jerome, would save hu-

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manity from this monstrous affront to the laws of life. He would do the deed as he had planned, by shock. Tonight.

Yes, tonight. He'd short the electrical current in the castle, go up to the laboratory in the dark, and shock Barsac to death. Never lay a hand on him. A simple plan, and it would succeed. It must succeed.

Jerome knew it must succeed by late afternoon—for when the vibrations sounded from above he realized he couldn't wait much longer. He couldn't stand the sound or the visions it conjured up. Barsac, draining his soul into the bodies of a horde of animals — it was impossible to bear the thought.

What were the animals? Not rats, he had said. Jerome remembered the rats. Barsac had refused to show him the other monstrosities. He only showed the rats with the deformed paws. The paws with the missing finger or missing claw.

Jerome prepared dinner and laughed. His apprehensions faded away with the memory of his dream.

THE paws. Of course! How foolish he was, letting Barsac's crazy talk and the morbid atmosphere of the castle affect him. Because of that and a few bad dreams he'd tricked himself into swallowing the grotesque claims of an obvious lunatic.

There *was* a machine—but any lunatic, given the funds and a scientific training, can build an imposing machine. That didn't prove that it actually worked as Barsac claimed it did.

There had been no other monstrosities for Jerome to see—for they didn't exist. Barsac's talk about previous experiments was merely talk.

There were the rats, but what of it? Barsac had been cunning. He had taken twenty rats, killed them, and removed their individual claws on the left forepaws.

That was all there was to it.

Barsac was crazy, and there was nothing to fear.

Doctor Jerome laughed again. That made it easier. He would kill the madman and take over. No more nightmares, no more fears.

His laughter blended with the thunder. A storm was breaking. It shattered in fury over the castle, and the rumbling swallowed the noise of the vibrations from the laboratory upstairs.

Jerome peered out of the window as jagged lightning slithered between the mountain crags.

The thunder grew louder.

Doctor Jerome turned back to get Barsac's tray ready. Then he paused.

"Why bother?" he whispered. Yes, why bother? Why wait any longer. He'd go upstairs now, shut off all the lights, knock on the laboratory door. Barsac would appear, expecting his dinner-tray. Instead, he'd find death.

Yes. He'd do it now, while the resolution held.

As the thunder mounted, Doctor Jerome walked up the stairs on his grim errand.

Lighting flickered as he reached the second landing. Jerome moved towards the switch panel on the wall. Then came the blinding bolt, and as thunder followed, the lights went out.

The storm had struck. It was an omen. Jerome exulted.

Now he moved up the spiral staircase leading to the laboratory landing at the top of the great castle tower. He groped his way slowly, in utter darkness, tensing himself for the moment when he would reach the oaken door and knock.

Then he listened, above the howling of the storm, for the vibrations from behind the door.

They had ceased, abruptly, when the lightning struck.

Jerome reached the top of the stairway. He edged towards the door. He was ready, now—

The door opened, swiftly.

Doctor Jerome heard Barsac's labored breathing.

"Jerome!" called Barsac. The voice was faint, but filled with overtones of triumph. "Jerome—where are you? I've succeeded, Jerome, I've succeeded beyond my wildest dreams!"

Jerome was very glad Barsac had called out. It enabled him to locate Barsac's body in the darkness.

Now he glided forward and brought his cold hands up to Barsac's neck. Sudden shock, a fright—

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But Barsac did not scream with fear. He screamed with anger.

"Jerome, it's you!" he shouted.

So he knew. Knew Jerome meant to kill him. Therefore he must die. Jerome's hands, which had risen merely to frighten, now remained to strangle.

He tightened his grip about Barsac's throat. Barsac tried to claw him off, but he could not see, and his gestures were pitifully weak.

Now Barsac did not cry out. He merely gurgled as Doctor Jerome pressed his windpipe and then dragged him back along the corridor. He dragged him swiftly, purposefully, and with his own feet he felt for the edge of the great staircase.

Then he thrust Barsac forward. There was a single shriek as Sebastian Barsac reeled in darkness, and then only a dreadful series of rubbery thumps as he plunged down the black well of the spiral staircase.

Doctor Jerome stood there as the thunder came again. When its muttering reverberation died away, the thumping had ended.

Barsac was at the bottom of the stairs.

Cautiously, Doctor Jerome descended the staircase. His feet groped for the next stair, and groped for the feel of Barsac's body. But it was not until he reached the bottom that his shoes met the resistant flesh of Barsac.

Jerome knelt and passed his hands over that flesh, finding it quite cold. As cold as death.

So it was done. Barsac was dead. Long live the new ruler of Castle Barsac!

Doctor Jerome straightened up with a grin. It was easy, after all. "Gentlemen, it was an unavoidable accident. Sebastian Barsac was at work in his laboratory when the lights went out. He came out into the hall, evidently with the purpose of descending the stairs. In the dark he must have made a misstep and fallen down the staircase."

He whispered the words aloud, just the way he meant to repeat them at the inquest. He heard their echoes rustle and die away.

And then he heard the *other* rustling.

It came from far overhead, from a room at the top of the stairs. A room at the top of the stairs—a rustling from the laboratory!

Jerome bounded up the stairs.

The animals were loose. He'd better lock the laboratory door, at once.

He heard the shrill squeaking as he made the second landing and turned to climb the last flight to the tower level.

Then he paused. For there was a drumming from the floor above—a padding and a scraping as small bodies moved down the hall. They had already left the laboratory.

For the first time he detected the ominous note in the squeaking sounds. Shrill little cries of anger resounded from the head of the stairs. They were angry, as Barsac had been angry when he had died. Barsac, who had come out, crowing in triumph that his experiments were successful beyond his wildest dreams.

*His experiments were successful!*

"I will transfer the physical attributes of myself, and also the mental attributes."

Jerome knew the meaning of fear, then.

THE creatures of Barsac's experiments were loose. The creatures whose bodies he had changed. Whose minds were a part of Barsac's mind.

They knew and they were loose. Loose and coming after him to seek revenge!

Jerome heard them creeping down the stairway. They were after him. They knew he was there—they could see in the dark! he turned in blind panic down the hallway. He'd hide in his room. That was it, his room. He stumbled through the pitch-black corridor, and heard them at his heels.

The beasts were swift. He reached the door, groped for his key. He fumbled in his pockets, cursing. The key wasn't on his ring. And the door was locked.

Perhaps he'd dropped it now, dropped it on the floor. He stooped to feel around.

And his hand encountered the warmth of flesh. Flesh that was furry, but not furry enough. Flesh that wriggled through his fingers.

The creatures had come!

Fangs nipped at his thumb. He stood up, hastily, and kicked out at the furry beast. But another body brushed his other ankle, and then they were all around him. Their squealing rose. One of the tiny monstrosities was crawling up his leg, and he felt the touch of minute fingers clinging to his body.

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Jerome screamed, and knew Barsac had spoken the truth. The monsters he had created with his mind were going to kill him in revenge for Barsac's death. And there was no escape.

Their squealing filled the corridor and their bodies blocked it completely. They swarmed around Doctor Jerome like ravening rats, but they were not rats. Jerome knew that if he should see them he would go mad. And if he did not see them they would crawl up his body and sink their horrible little mouths in his throat, stroke his face with their ghastly fingers.

Jerome wheeled and charged down the corridor again. The nightmare ranks broke for a moment and he sped down the black corridor of the haunted castle with the beasts of Barsac at his heels. He was playing tag with death in a nighted lair, and death ran behind him on purposeful paws. Death squealed and chattered, and Jerome fled.

He had to get out before they reached him, touched him, took him. He had to.

Gasping in agony he reached the corridor's end, knowing that the horde was keeping pace. He turned again, ran forward. He never gave a thought to the stairs.

And then, as the squealing rose and echoed in his ears, Doctor Jerome tumbled down the castle staircase and landed with a sickening little crunch that he never heard. His head lolled grotesquely on the broken stem of a neck. He lay next to the body of Sebastian Barsac, and like Barsac, he was quite dead.

It was casual irony that chose this moment for the castle lights to flicker on again.

They revealed nothing but the two bodies lying at the foot of the stairs. Mad Barsac lay dead, and so did mad Jerome.

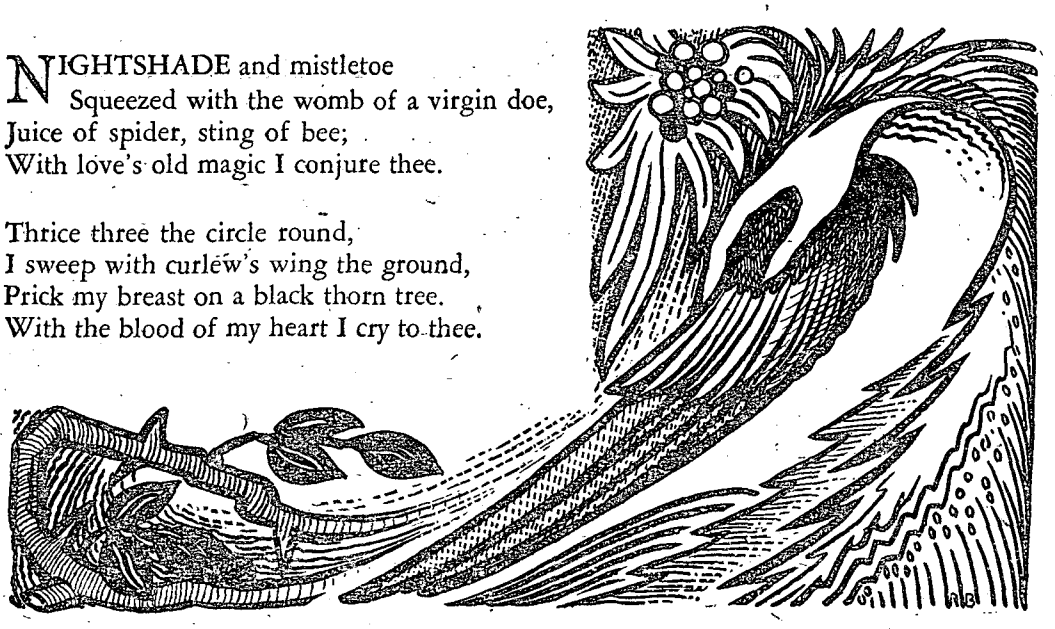
On the landing above, the twenty escaped guinea pigs blinked down with stupid, uncomprehending eyes.

# A Charm

By PAGE COOPER

NIGHTSHADE and mistletoe
Squeezed with the womb of a virgin doe,
Juice of spider, sting of bee;
With love's old magic I conjure thee.

Thrice three the circle round,
I sweep with curlew's wing the ground,
Prick my breast on a black thorn tree.
With the blood of my heart I cry to thee.



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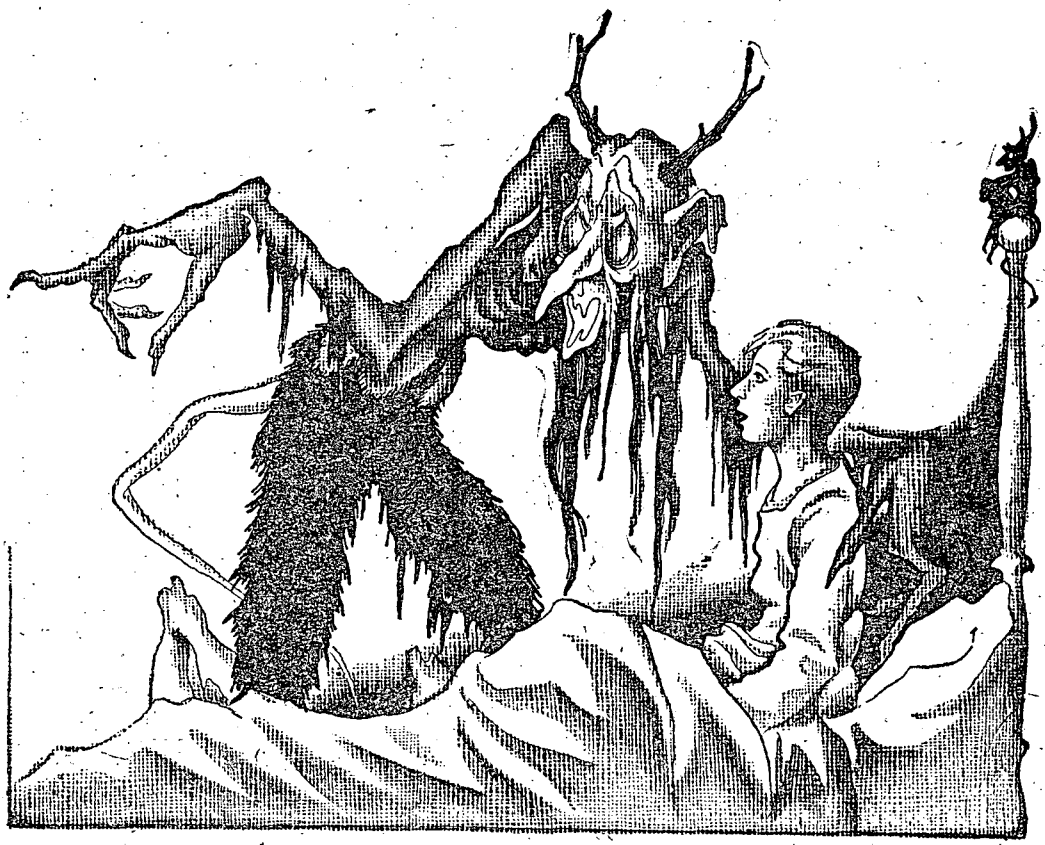

# Guard in the Dark

*By ALLISON V. HARDING*

PROUDLY little Ronald Frost showed the new tutor his row on row of shiny lead soldiers . . . soldiers in the painted khaki of the army, in the navy dark blue, and in the blue with red trimming of the marines. Some were standing, some were marching, some lying on their stomachs, guns pointed forward.

"Look at my machine gunners," said the twelve-year-old boy to Jeffry Wilburts as he pointed to another part of the shelf whereon lay squad after squad of tiny toy figures, each with a machine gun — sub-machine guns and light and heavy ones.

Jeffry nodded interestedly and took some of the pieces off the shelf to look at them more closely.

"Be very careful!" the little boy cautioned

**Heading by BORIS DOLGOV**

*The tin soldiers were not just playthings—they were pawns in a ruleless war of horror*



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as Wilburts minutely examined a soldier holding the minature replica of an automatic rifle.

"Sure I will. Tell me, Ronald, why do you have so many? You must have several hundred soldiers here."

"Need 'em," said the youngster, his mouth setting in a tight line.

"Do you like to recreate battles, I mean fight out some of the campaigns of the war?" It had occurred to Wilburts that perhaps his pupil's mania for toy soldiers had such a significance.

"Nope."

"Well, what then?"

"I have to have them." Ronald Frost turned away from his toy closet with a fist full of marines. Jeffry watched him as he meticulously replaced the tin soldiers that had been clustered in groups on the tables and floor of his bedroom.

Jeffry Wilburts smiled to himself. "Ah, changing the guard, eh?"

"Yes." No more than that. Not very communicative.

Wilburts noticed that Ronald placed the soldiers in a careful pattern. They formed a circle of toy-soldier protection around the center of the room. The center where Ronald Frost's bed was!

WHEN Jeffry Wilburts, fresh from a teacher's college course, had interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Frost for the job, this had been the main thing they had told him that day in the Frost's pleasant suburban home.

"He's not at all a dull boy," said Mrs. Frost with a sort of a perplexed pride, "but he has this fixation about soldiers."

"I'd have to tell you what our bill is supplying the boy with these lead soldiers," snorted Mr. Frost. "And besides, I think Ronald is getting about old enough to give up playing with toy things like that."

The Frosts had liked young Wilburts and he them. He had taken up residence there as companion and tutor to Ronald. He soon realized that the young Frost lad was no ordinary twelve-year-old. The boy was bright when he wanted to be. He had imagination.

But with all of this Jeffry detected a certain listlessness that was most unbecoming a chap of Ronald's years. He shunned the company of other children of his age in the neighborhood, and although he did passably well in school—his teacher told Wilburts that he would be an honor-roll pupil if he would only try—his social adjustments were not at all normal.

He detested the games that went on in the school yard and was in the habit of sneaking off home after class was out instead of mixing with his peers in a raid on the local ice-cream parlor.

"We need somebody to bring him out," said Mrs. Frost to Wilburts. "Heaven knows Mr. Frost and I have tried to do all we can for him. . . ."

"You might be able to help my son, er, if I had one, but you can't help your own," quoted Wilburts brightly from something he remembered in a child psychology class.

"It seems you're right," sighed Mrs. Frost. "We can't help him, apparently. I still think a lot of this has to do with those stupid soldiers he's so preoccupied with!"

"High time the boy got over these ideas," said Mr. Frost with an angry rustle of the paper. "But don't try to just take the soldiers away from him. It's an impossible task." Mr. Frost elaborately rolled his eyes ceilingward. "I tried it once and he got so excited . . . well, we had to call Dr. Brown."

Properly warned and initiated on the way things stood Wilburts started to apply his great knowledge of child psychology, learned from dusty library tomes and aged professors who were much nearer their second childhood than their first.

Jeffry quietly decided that he would closely observe the boy. It was preposterous to try and bully the lad. You never got anywhere that way. And it was most old-fashioned.

In the corner of the room, almost behind a screen that hid a wash basin, was an easy chair. Jeffry made it his in the evenings, obtensibly to chat with Ronald, but really to watch the ritual that went on, commencing when the light sneaked slowly from the room across the sky into the west.

Out of his play closet Ronald would bring scores more soldiers to supplement the ones that, all day, had been grouped in small clusters around the room. Jeffry watched this

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procedure for several nights before he felt that it was time to pop a few questions.

THIS evening Wilburts watched as the twelve-year-old arranged his miniature troops. The tutor was once more taken with the precise and scientific way the lad covered the room with his knots of soldiers.

"Ronald."

"Um?"

"Why do you do this every night?"

"'Cause I need to, that's why."

"You like to have them around you, eh?"

The little boy's face was tight-lipped and grim for one so young. He said nothing for a moment.

"I have to have them around me."

He placed six blue-clad soldiers on the edge of the washstand beside Jeffry. Wilburts found himself staring at the soldiers fascinatedly. Their uniforms were such exact replicas of the real thing, their equipment so cleverly copied, their little figures stalwart in rigid posture—only their little gray-white lead faces completely unlifelike, expressionless like putty-wax dolls. Wilburts looked from one to the other of the six little figurines. All their faces wore a blank, mysterious, nothingness expression, an ageless passiveness that could only be achieved in lead.

Jeffry Wilburts counted forty-five soldiers around the room. Some were on the bed table, others, numbering among them several machine gunners, were on the floor at the four corners of the bed.

Wilburts shook his head and after good nights were said went off to his room down the hall. The situation was an intriguing one. Here was a lad who was logical on all subjects as far as he, Jeffry Wilburts, could make out—and he could make out very well—and yet he had an obsession on soldiers. Wilburts comforted himself to sleep with the thought that the Frost's could not have gotten in a better man for the job of handling the boy.

In the morning, violating his usual custom of dressing and going right down to breakfast, Wilburts went in Ronald's room still in slippers and bathrobe. The boy was bending over something on the floor and didn't hear Jeffry.

"Morning," said Wilburts lustily.

Young Frost turned quickly, putting his hand behind his back. He glowered at the tutor.

Wilburts started forward slowly. Ah ha, here was something interesting. He was determined to see what Ronald was hiding. The boy backed away from him as he came on.

"Ronald, what is it you have there?"

The boy said nothing but merely stepped backward until he came against the closet door. He was fumbling for the knob, his eyes hatefully on Jeffry when the companion stepped forward quickly and pinned Ronald's arms to his sides.

"Now, let me see," gritted Wilburts, surprised at the strength in the youngster's body. The two swayed together for a minute, Ronald's face white with strain and then the man's strength forced the boy's hands outward and forward and then finally the small, tight fingers opened and objects dropped to the floor. Wilburts stepped back, one hand still holding the boy's wrist and bent over.

With his other hand he explored downward. The objects were toy soldiers, or at least, parts of them. Heads and torsos, legs and arms, little guns broken loose from the solder that held them to tiny lead bodies —like real soldiers who have been in battle . . . a score of soldiers, broken and bent —dead soldiers!

Ronald stood back now, breathing rapidly. He looked at the floor and then at Wilburts. Jeffry hardly knew what to do. His first impulse was to grin the whole matter off.

"Say, you've busted up a lot of those soldiers, Ronald."

To cover his own lack of assurance he put a note of reprimand in his voice as he talked.

THE boy said nothing. He simply knelt down and began to gather up the pieces of the broken soldiers. He turned and walked slowly into the closet and Jeffry heard the noise as they were dropped into a receptacle there. Not knowing what else to do Wilburts walked back to his own room and after dressing quickly, went downstairs.

Before Ronald arrived he had poured out his story to Mr. and Mrs. Frost. If his soul

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needed absolution, he got it from the two.

"That's just it," said Mr. Frost. "He demands these soldiers for birthday and Christmas and God knows any other time that I can be wheedled out of a dollar or so, but the boy is so destructive with them it's endless. We can't keep up with him.

"Don't worry about it, Mr. Wilburts." Mrs. Frost also put in her oar. "I just wish you could get him away from those soldiers permanently. I sometimes think they mean more to him than his father and I do."

Thus, his consicence surfeited, Wilburts attacked his wheat cakes with vigor and did not even look up when Ronald stole in a few minutes later with a small good morning to his parents.

Despite his smugness and the disadvantage of theoretical training, Jeffry Wilburts was not entirely lacking in sense. He realized that Ronald, who before had merely tolerated him without question or enthusiasm, now attempted to avoid him as much as possible. This would never do. The first goal for the companion or tutor is to win and hold the youngster's confidence and friendship. Both from the standpoint of his future as a teacher and tutor and for the sake of his immediate pocketbook it would never do to alienate Ronald to the degree where the Frosts, despite their obvious liking for him, would have to look for somebody else.

Obviously, his campaign to win back Ronald's tolerance would have to be centered around the soldiers. On his day off in town Wilburts paid a visit to the toy department of a large department store where, after not a little thought, he discovered a set of khaki-clad troops, each with a sub-machine gun, and led by a nattily dressed officer with holstered revolver. Three dollars.

On his way out to the suburbs, Wilburts took the set from its wrappings and eyed the soldiers with satisfaction. Three dollars meant a good deal to Jeffry Wilburts, but after all, he philosophized, you have to spend money in this world if you're going to get ahead. He looked closely at the soldiers and marveled casually at the care with which they were made, the uniforms and guns so precisely duplicating the real thing. The same deadpan faces, though. A faint spot of color on the cheeks and then a lifeless putty white-lead face. Jeffry picked up the officer and scrutinized him closely. He grinned at the expressionless tiny face and then suddenly realized that the passenger sitting opposite was eyeing him amusedly.

He put his package away carefully and settled back in the day coach with a copy of "Approach to Education."

Jeffry Wilburts' scheme worked.

"For me?" said Ronald with brightening interest as Jeffry took the cover off the box revealing the contents.

"Golly," and the youngsters made a grab at the precious package.

The lad took the soldiers out one by one, examining them closely. His face was bright and the look he turned on Wilburts was worth three dollars and more.

"Oh, thank you, thank you so much, Mr. Wilburts. I need them so," and Ronald ran off toward his room. It seemed that Jeffry had scored with his ward . . . but not with the Frosts.

"Now what the dickens did you go and do that for?" said Mr. Frost in an annoyed voice.

Wilburts realized that some explaining was in order. It wouldn't do to win back the boy at the cost of the parents' regard.

"I'm trying to work this problem out, Mr. Frost. This is my line of work and you've got to let me handle it in my own way. I don't want the boy to think I'm against him."

Mr. Frost took Jeffry's side. "I think he's right, dear. If Mr. Wilburts can get Ronald's confidence he'll be able to do more with him."

Mr. Frost harrumphed. "I think the best thing to do would be to take all those damn soldiers and chuck 'em out." He went back to his paper with an angry rustle.

"You know what Dr. Brown said, dear," Mrs. Frost reminded. "The child is emotional."

DAYS passed and with the gift Ronald and Jeffry Wilburts came somewhat closer. Whatever his peculiarities, little Frost was a clever lad and Wilburts began to see visions of himself receiving accolades as his young pupil went on to take high honors in school.

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Ronald seemed to resent less Jeffry's more frequent visits to his room, and the longer time spent there. It was interesting to Wilburts that the new soldiers that he had brought to the boy weren't immediately used. Ronald put them away in the closet.

"Aren't they all right?" the tutor queried anxiously.

"Oh, sure, but they aren't quite ready yet."

"Ready for what, Ronald? I don't understand."

The young boy got an impatient tilt to his head. "You don't put troops into real battle without training, do you?" And he leveled a most scathing look at Wilburts that seemed to say "any fool should know that."

"Oh, of course," said the companion hastily.

It was a week afterward that Mr. Frost met Wilburts outside and called him over to the side of the house where the waste receptacle stood.

"Look," Frost said pointing.

WILBURTS followed the direction of the pointing, and there, in among the throwouts was a pile of broken tin soldiers —easily a half a hundred of them.

"It's a disgraceful waste. I will not allow my son to grow up with such a streak of wanton destruction in him," stormed Frost.

Wilburts tactfully agreed with him and said he would speak to Ronald that evening.

It was dark outside when the two, tutor and young boy, retired to the latter's room. Automatically, the lad went about his job of placing out the soldier patrols. Jeffry noticed idly that by now Ronald was using the machine gunners he had given him.

Wilburts broke the silence. "I saw a whole lot of your broken soldiers outside in the waste receptacle."

The boy showed little interest.

Wilburts went on. "That's pretty costly, you breaking them that way, Ronald. I hope you're not going to do that to the ones I gave you."

"*I* don't break them," Ronald turned to the tutor. "I don't break them."

"It's an expensive thing to do," went on Wilburts, ignoring the boy's denial. "Why not conserve the ones you have. Just between us, young feller, I don't think your father liked my giving you those soldiers the other day."

Ronald paled and came over toward Wilburts. "I've got to have soldiers, Mr. Wilburts. I've just got to. I need more now. Every night some get killed."

"You mean you break them," corrected Jeffry with a smile.

"I don't break them," Ronald cried. "I've told Mummy and Dad that, too."

"Well, every morning there are a few more all broken . . . how come?"

"They're dead."

"Ronald!"

"I don't break them."

"You're talking foolishness, young feller. If you don't break them, who does? And it happens at night when you're in here alone. Surely you don't think I or your parents come in here and break your soldiers, do you?"

"No."

"Well, what then?"

Ronald hung silent, then said finally, "I don't exactly know."

Jeffry Wilburts persisted. "Now you're adding one bad habit to another. You're telling an untruth. We're not thinking of punishing you because you break your soldiers. They're yours, but we're trying to make you see that it is a dreadful waste. It makes your father very angry. You want more and more soldiers—why mother says she bought twenty-five dollars' worth of lead soldiers for your last birthday. That's a lot . . . and then you go and break them."

Ronald was nearly on the point of tears. "But I don't break them, I tell you."

"Oh Ronald," Wilburts turned away with a feigned attitude of disgust.

"They protect me!"

"The soldiers?"

"Yes, and they get killed protecting me."

"Oh," so the lad wanted to carry this fantasy further, eh. "And just what is it that kills them, Germans and Japs, I suppose! Right here!"

"No," cried Ronald. "I tell you I don't know exactly. It's something I can feel at night. It comes in here. Into this room."

"And you need the soldiers to protect you, like a bodyguard?"

"Yes," the youngster turned beseeching eyes toward the older man. "I have to have

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more soldiers. Please help me get them. I don't know what will happen if I can't."

THAT night after Ronald had gone to bed Wilburts had a long talk with the Frosts.

"It's my opinion," said Wilburts pompously, "that you ought to have your doctor look over this chap."

"Oh dear, you don't think he's coming down with anything, do you? There's been a lot of scarlet . . ."

Wilburts interrupted. "No, no, I don't mean anything like that. I mean, I think this soldier complex has gone a bit too far. . . . I think we ought to have a doctor . . ." and Jeffry tapped his head.

"Oh," said Mrs. Frost.

"We'll get Dr. Brown," boomed Mr. Frost. "I'll call him before I leave for town tomorrow and we'll have him stop by. I think it's a good idea, Wilburts."

On his way to his room Jeffry silently opened the door of Ronald's room and peered inside. The room was dark and from the bed came the sound of the boy's breathing, deep and regular. Certainly nothing going on now. At least sleep kept him from playing his games. As he turned softly to go his foot almost struck a lone soldier on the floor near the door. He stooped and saw it was one of the machine gunners he had given Ronald, gun at the ready in a lifelike poise. Wilburts smiled and tiptoed into the hall.

Dr. Brown, prototype of the solid, jolly, optimistic country doctor, was in the next day in the late afternoon. He examined Ronald thoroughly and came downstairs with the opinion that "the young chap was high strung with a nervous constitution but physically he's sound . . . nothing to worry about."

After Brown had huffed and grunted his way into his great coat and departed, Wilburts thought seriously about telling Mrs. Frost that the country practitioner wasn't exactly the kind of doctor he had had in mind when he'd suggested that somebody look at Ronald, but Mrs. Frost seemed so carefree since the physician's visit and verdict that he decided to put it off for a while.

And when Mr. Frost came in at night and received the news he snorted and said, "Just what I thought, there's nothing the matter with the young scalawag; he just needs to be taught some good common sense," and looked meaningfully at Jeffry Wilburts, who thereupon decided to put off delivering his opinion of Brown for good.

Time passed and Ronald's pleadings for new soldiers became incessant and frenzied.

"But it's not nearly Christmas yet, Ronald. We can't be buying you things every time you have the wish," Mrs. Frost reasoned.

"And for Christmas it's time you wanted something like boxing gloves or a fishing rod," roared Mr. Frost to his son. "No more of these soldiers, my boy. That's for children. You don't want to be like a child now you're twelve."

It was increasingly evident that night by night Ronald's troops were being thinned out, by some contrary or destructive process, reasoned Wilburts.

Late one fall evening Ronald did something unprecedented. He crept into Jeffry Wilburts' room. The tutor was moved by this visit from the boy and adopted his most friendly attitude.

"Well, hello there. Are you still walking around at this hour?"

"Mr. Wilburts, I want to talk to you, please." His eyes were downcast.

"Sure, Ronald. Go ahead," and Wilburts dropped the book he was reading and smiled in friendly fashion at the youngster.

The boy stood for a moment unsurely in the center of the floor and then looked up from his slipper toes and at Jeffry.

"It's about the soldiers," he breathed out.

Wilburts didn't say anything.

"You see how my Mummy and Dad are about it. But I thought, I thought maybe you could—would get me some more. I need them, Mr. Wilburts."

WILBURTS frowned and shook his head. "You know what your family thinks about this, Ronald. You wouldn't want me to do anything behind their backs, would you!"

"It's that I don't have much more," pleaded Ronald. "After a few more nights I don't know what'll happen."

"Nonsense," expostulated Wilburts, not understanding what the boy could be going

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on about so. "Just stop breaking them and you'll have enough."

"I don't break them," Ronald stamped obstinately.

"All right, then, whoever does, see they don't. No, I can't get you any more, Ronald. Most likely you'll be breaking mine soon," this last petulantly with thought of his own cash outlay. "Now you'd better makes tracks back off to bed."

Without another word the little boy turned and went off to bed.

The next day with Ronald off at school Jeffry took the opportunity to investigate the closet where the boy kept his precious soldiers. He noted that stock of lead soldiers was truly low. And in a metal basket at the corner of the room were the broken parts of several dozen soldiers. It was wrong the way the boy kept breaking them. Why couldn't they be fixed up?

That night when Ronald was setting up his soldiers—all that were left unbroken—Wilburts brightly said, "The thing to do is to solder the broken parts together. Don't just chuck them out that way. How about it, Ronald?"

The boy turned toward him, "Don't you see, that doesn't do any good. When a soldier is dead, he's dead. You can't stick him together and make him a soldier again. He's just a statue."

I give up, thought Wilburts.

The next morning Jeffry found the boy picking up the usual broken and twisted soldiers. More than ever the lad's bedroom looked like the scene of a horrendous battle. The thought appealed to Wilburts. World campaigns fought on a small scale with toy soldiers! It was intriguing.

All through the day the boy moped, showing little interest in anything. Dark circles under his eyes testified to the fact that he had not slept too well. He answered solicitous queries from his mother asking how he felt with short replies.

As night approached he excused himself and went upstairs early. Mr. Frost harrumped the whole business off. Mrs. Frost thought maybe he was coming down with something. Jeffry Wilburts, after saying good night himself, decided to go upstairs and see what was going on.

With greater care than ever before Ronald was arranging his blank-faced little soldiers—at his bed table and on the floor around his bed. Jeffry sat in the chair by the washstand and watched, ignored by young Frost.

"You haven't very many left," accused Wilburts.

"Not enough tonight, not nearly enough," replied the boy half to himself.

The preparations went on for some time and then Ronald undressed himself and got into bed. "Good night, Mr. Wilburts."

Somewhat taken aback at the lad's perfunctory attitude the tutor mumbled good night and left the room. Several hours later, in his own chamber, it sleepily occurred to the half-awake Wilburts that it might be a good idea to watch the youngster for a while. And when he got up in the night to step on his soldiers in some perversion of fantasy, why Jeffry would catch him red-handed. Grabbing a large loose-leaf notebook in which to jot down anything of worth and sticking a pencil in his pocket he stole down the corridor, opened Ronald's door ever so softly and crept into the darkened room.

Ah, the chair by the washstand. That would be a fine vantage spot. The man seated himself and settled into the most comfortable position. As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, the room began to assume shape. The bedtable and the bed loomed up slowly out of the blackness. The softly breathing bundle on the bed was Ronald. His pupils enlarging to compensate for the gloom, Jeffry began to make out the little knots of soldiers, some of them his gift to Ronald, around the room. He smiled to himself. Now just wait for that little imp to get up and start to break his soldiers just as an excuse to get some new ones!

TIME at night and in the dark barely exists. It is the hand of a watch slowly creeping around a luminous dial, the slow breathing of a human, the strange night sound of soundlessness. How long Jeffry sat there before he began to nod he did not guess or try to guess.

He drifted out of nothingness to awareness for no immediately appreciable reason. The room took a vague, unreal form before him. The window was a quartered

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square of faint lightness to his left. The curtains moved sluggishly in the night air—but there was something else! There was some other movement in the room. Jeffry's hands felt numb in his lap. The white there was his open notebook. Was Ronald astir? No, he could see—yes, that must be Ronald's head there on the pillow. Suddenly Wilburts felt his eyes drawn inexorably to something moving on the floor near him.

He looked—he could move his eyes but the rest of him was seemingly paralyzed. That movement was—a soldier, soldiers! The toy soldiers were moving! All the while Wilburts clearly registered these thoughts, his mind was anesthetized with a numbness of shock or sleep—or death. It was quite impossible. All around in the dark corners small things were deploying—small lead figures, running and crouching, holding their tiny guns in readiness!

But the mind-shocking fantasy was not over—this hallucination, for that it must be, reasoned one small hindmost part of Jeffry Wilburts' brain, was not passing.

What had awakened him, he realized now, was the Breathing. Not from the bed, not from little Ronald, but from somewhere—someone else. A breathing that was like the exhalations from the lungs of a dozen dying men, like the mournful wash of sea on an open coast, like a thousand things, all unpleasant—all inhuman or soon to be!

Then the breathing was a shadow. A shadow that was dark and made the rest of the room seem light in comparison. A blotch of preposterously shaped blackness that had no reason and no reality, except that it *was*. Slowly it was coming. From the window and the door and the ceiling and the walls . . . all at once!

Wilburts could barely move. His fingers twitched in his lap, on the sides of the notebook that lay in his lap. For the paralysis of his body, his eyes tried to make up. For they were darting everywhere. Jeffry looked at the bed and there was Ronald sitting up, his eyes white discs of blank, stark fear.

Great activity was taking place on the floor around the bed. Suddenly a tiny flash, followed by others in rapid succession from different sections of the room, attracted the tutor's eye. The soldiers were fighting back!

BUT whatever it was they were fighting was still coming. A breathing, panting noise of a thing. Nameless, descriptionless except for the grotesque shadow it threw. The soldiers were scattering as the shadow darkened and grew in intensity around the bed. Jeffry saw that one after another the toy guards were going down. The flashes of firing were growing less frequent. Still the noises in the room were the distant, indistinct but recognizable noises of battle heard from afar—and all the time the heavy, slobbery breathing grew in volume until its wheezing inhalations were like a giant bellows half-full of unhealthy water.

But the crowning blow of terror came to Jeffry Wilburts when he felt a tug and pulling on his trousers and suddenly, as he looked down, a tiny figure pulled itself desperately into his lap. That part of Wilburts' mind still functioning in a semi-rational manner dimly recognized the tin soldier as the officer of the ones he had given to Ronald.

But now the officer, standing on Wilburts' open notebook, had his revolver out of his holster and was shooting toward the center of the room—shooting upward, upward where something black was hovering over the bed upon which a little boy, sat and stared with the gaze of one who cannot see beyond the inside of his eyes.

The breathing sound was deafening and suffocating. The air was filled with a dampness, a vibration that was maddening, the armed resistance from the floor and bed-table had ceased. The monster—whatever it was—had won. Jeffry wished himself awake and with a terrific effort of will forced his hands upward. He pushed his notebook shut and drove himself up and toward the door. He had no memory of opening it and stepping out into the hall, or of getting into his own bed, throwing the notebook into his bag and falling on his bed.

The next morning Ronald didn't come down to breakfast. Wilburts, although he had a memory of a very bad dream, attached no significance to this—that was until Mrs. Frost went upstairs and let out a scream for the others. Jeffry and Mr. Frost ran up the stairs. Ronald was sitting up in bed grinning at them strangely. Briefly, Wilburts' attention went to the floor. Everywhere

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were the soldiers—every one broken. Another pitiful cry came from Mrs. Frost as the two men rushed closer. It was frightfully obvious. The boy was utterly mad; he had turned into a complete, raving idiot in the night!

As he rode toward the city Jeffry Wilburts thought unpleasantly of that last day at the Frosts. He remembered the strange cawing noises the boy had made, the drooling from the mouth, Dr. Brown's visit and the call for specialists. He shuddered. It was most unpleasant. And most of all the remembrance of his own terrifying dream. But he did remember planning to go down to Ronald's room and sit there for a while to see what would go on. Yes, of course, he'd even taken a notebook to report anything of significance.

On inspiration Jeffry reached into his bag and brought forth the large loose-leaf book.

As he pulled it onto his lap he noticed the bulge. He flipped open the pages and caught the object as it fell out.

It was the toy soldier-officer! Wilburts wet his lips and his head pounded.

The one that had come with the soldiers he had given Ronald not so many weeks ago. The one that had crawled upon his lap and onto the notebook in his dreadful dream last night!

Wilburts' mind worked slowly over the details, chewing each fact slowly while his face tingled and dampened.

He brought the soldier closer, much closer to his face. Wilburts' fingers trembled. It was all quite impossible!

The tiny lead face should be a blob of expressionless putty and paint. But it wasn't.

Instead the toy soldier's countenance was frozen in a grimace of unspeakable horror—rivaled only by the face of the man so near its own!

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# SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS

by Ill

IF A DROP OF BLOOD FROM A WEST AFRICAN FELL ON THE GROUND IT WAS CAREFULLY COVERED UP, RUBBED AND STAMPED INTO THE SOIL. IF IT FELL ON THE SIDE OF A CANOE, THE PLACE WAS CUT OUT AND THE CHIP DESTROYED! IT WAS BELIEVED THAT IF THE BLOOD FELL INTO THE HANDS OF MAGICIANS, THEY COULD MAKE EVIL USE OF IT!

THE FIRST FOUR TIMES THAT AN APACHE INDIAN WENT OUT ON THE WAR-PATH, HE WAS BOUND TO REFRAIN FROM SCRATCHING HIS HEAD WITH HIS FINGERS AND FROM LETTING WATER TOUCH HIS LIPS! HE HAD TO SCRATCH HIS HEAD WITH A STICK AND DRINK THROUGH A HOLLOW REED OR CANE!

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# The Spare Room

*By CRAWFORD SULLIVAN*

ED JACOBS hadn't wanted to buy the house in the first place; he had been trying to save three thousand dollars to buy half interest in Mr. Cash's hardware business. But Ellen pleaded and cried, and said a home was the best investment a couple could make—and furthermore they could rent out the spare room until they decided to raise a family. Ed said no, positively; the payments would be more than they could afford, and the house wasn't worth the money. Two days later Ellen took him down to the bank to sign the papers.

The house was sandwiched in between two other houses which were exactly like it. It was two stories high, long and narrow, with a staircase on one side and the

Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE

*It's a sound idea to check on a prospective boarder—after all monsters usually can't dig up good references!*



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rooms on the other. All in all, it was not much different from thousands of other houses, but Ellen Jacobs thought it was very extraordinary. As it turned out, she wasn't wrong. The house was probably the most extraordinary residence in Brooklyn.

Ed held down a pretty good job selling merchandise for the J. M. Cash Hardware Store. Being a hardware merchant is something like being a doctor: you have to diagnose everybody's plumbing troubles, doorbell failures, electrical leakages and so on. Ed had a friendly, conservative manner which made customers trust him like an uncle. He seemed to know everything about everything, and he could make you feel like you were getting ten dollars worth of information with a dollar sixty-nine cent purchase.

Ellen was one of those extremely feminine women who scream bloody murder at the sight of a mouse. She was slightly faded—the way most blondes get when they slide over the thirty-year mark—but she was still attractive enough to be whistled at now and then. Ed and Ellen had been married a long time, and they got along fine. The only thing they had serious disagreements about was what movie to see on Saturday night. Ellen liked love stories, musicals and sophisticated comedies; but Ed went for those Grade B horror pictures that packed the audiences in down at the Lyric.

"I can't understand why you like those awful shows," Ellen protested. "The last time we went I didn't sleep a wink for two nights."

Ed gave an unsympathetic chuckle. "I love 'em," he said. "They make you forget about everything else. It's a sort of relaxation."

"I don't see anything relaxing about it. Especially that last one, where the girl turned into a wolf and nearly bit her lover's arm off."

"Didn't bother me a bit. The trouble with you is, you let your imagination run away with you."

"Of course I know that such things don't ever really happen," Ellen said quickly. "But just the same—"

"Did you read that book, *Warlocks and Werewolves,* I got out of the public library?" Ed asked. "The guy that wrote it claims that supernatural things happen all the time. People have just gotten so civilized they don't like to admit it. The guy ought to know what he's talking about; he's a professor at New York University—name's Matthew Faust. He sounds like a smart Joe."

"He can't be very smart if he believes in those kind of things," sniffed Ellen.

"Can't tell," said Ed archly. "We might have a ghost right in this house. Sometimes at night when I hear the doors creak I think that—"

"Ed—quit it!"

Ed laughed his head off. He always liked to get a rise out of her.

THEY had lived in the house a month or so when Ellen put an ad in the paper to rent the room. The first person who answered it was a girl from the dime store; but Ellen turned her down. "I don't want a woman," she told Ed. "They always want to borrow your clothes and use your electric iron. I'd like a nice, substantial bachelor, around middle age."

Shortly after dinner a man came to the door. He wore a black topcoat and a snap-brimmed hat with a black satin band. He inquired about the room, speaking in a low voice that had a trace of an accent—something like Charles Boyer. Ed invited him in.

"My name's Jacobs," he said. "This is my wife, Mr.—I didn't get the name."

"Kraken," the man replied. "Mr. Kraken." He removed his hat and bowed in Ellen's direction. His hair was shiny black and seemed glued to the top of his head. His eyebrows started in the vicinity of his temples and extended down to the bridge of his nose in a kind of "V." He was a rather distinguished-looking man, Ellen thought.

"You work near here, Mr. Kraken?" she inquired.

"At the shipyard," he nodded. "I am on the night shift."

Ed glanced at the man's hands. They were long and slender, with tapering fingers and slightly pointed nails. "You do some sort of clerical work?"

"I am a draftsman," Mr. Kraken replied. "I must sleep during the day, and I do not

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wish to be disturbed. I am anxious to find a room where I can have complete privacy. I am willing to pay fifty-five dollars a month if the room is suitable."

"Oh." Ellen swallowed hard. She had intended to ask thirty-five and get thirty.

They showed Mr. Kraken the room, and he seemed satisfied with it—so satisfied, in fact, that he paid a full month's rent on the spot.

HE arrived at seven the following evening with a small suitcase and left for work about an hour later. Ed didn't pay much attention at the time because he was listening to his favorite radio program, *The Green Ghoul*. Ed hardly gave Mr. Kraken another thought until quite a while—three weeks, to be exact—after he had moved in.

"I've only seen that guy about twice," he told Ellen. "Where does he keep himself?"

"In his room, I guess." She was busy making a pie for Sunday dinner and didn't want to be bothered. "He sleeps all day."

"Even on Sunday."

"I guess so. We don't see him much because he goes in and out the back door. He says he's afraid he'll disturb us if he goes tramping through the house late at night."

"Maybe he's wanted by the police," Ed suggested.

"Heavens, no," said Ellen. "If that was the case, he wouldn't be working at the shipyard. He's just naturally shy."

Ed thought it over. "Wonder if he's in his room now?"

Ellen put the dough into a pie pan and pressed little dents around the edges. "Maybe."

"Think I'll go up and see."

"You better not." She looked perturbed. "He said he wanted absolute privacy during the day."

"He couldn't get sore if I just tap on the door and ask him down for a cup of coffee. It's nearly four o'clock."

Ed went up stairs. He started to knock on Mr. Kraken's door, then paused. The transom was closed and dark, indicating that the window blinds were drawn. Maybe he *was* still asleep. Ed walked away, changed his mind, came back and rapped on the door. No reply. He rapped again—this time a little harder. Still no reply. He tried the door and found it locked. Insatiably curious, he crouched down and peeked through the keyhole. His perimeter of visibility included a smoothly covered bed, a bare-topped bureau, an unoccupied chair and no sign of Mr. Kraken.

"What are you doing?"

Ed jumped up, looking guilty as a sheep dog munching mutton, and saw Ellen standing at the end of the hall. "I—I thought maybe he was sick or something," he blurted. "But he isn't there."

"Dear me, can't the man go out on Sunday afternoon if he wants?"

"I didn't see him go out—and I've been in the house all day."

"He probably went out the back while you were in the parlor. Ed, sometimes you are like a nosey old woman. It's a good thing we don't run a hotel."

Ed went downstairs muttering something under his breath. He felt ashamed of himself, and it made him mad at the world in general and Mr. Kraken in particular. He was going to lay for that guy and have a talk with him. If Mr. Kraken wanted to live there, he could use the front door like everybody else—instead of sneaking up and down the back stairs.

AFTER dinner, while Ellen was listening to the radio, Ed went to the kitchen, locked the back door and bolted it. He then parked himself on the front steps and smoked a cigarette. When Mr. Kraken came home, he'd have to use his front door, and Ed was determined to be there waiting for him.

Hardly anybody was on the street. It was time for Jack Benny, and all the radios in the block were blaring. After about ten minutes Ed was tempted to give up his vigil and go inside. The program sounded like it might be funny.

"Don't you find it rather cold out here?"

Ed looked over his shoulder and saw Mr. Kraken standing behind him—*in the doorway!* He looked taller than usual, and the light from the street lamp made his eyes shine.

"Where did—? I thought you were out!" Ed said, fumbling for words.

"Surely you had no reason to think that?" Mr. Kraken stared at Ed squarely, his sweep-

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ing eyebrows resembling a couple of question marks.

"Only that it's Sunday," asserted Ed. "Most everyone goes some place on Sunday." He lit another cigarette and tried to appear unconcerned.

"I work every night and sleep every day," declared Mr. Kraken. "I live in a purgatory where there is neither sun nor Sunday."

Ed was definitely perplexed. He knew perfectly well that Mr. Kraken hadn't been in the room that afternoon—unless he had happened to be standing out of sight when Ed looked through the keyhole. One thing certain—Mr. Kraken hadn't been asleep. Ed had seen that much with his own eyes.

"You're going to work now?" Ed asked.

Mr. Kraken nodded.

"I have to get some cigarettes," Ed lied. "Mind if I walk a ways with you?"

"Not at all." The reply was politely insincere, as if to let Ed know that his company would be tolerated but not preferred.

Mr. Kraken had a brisk, gliding walk that made Ed hustle to keep up with him. All the time Ed was wondering where Mr. Kraken had been that afternoon. He *must* have been in the house. He couldn't have come in the back door and gone out the front, because the back door was locked. Ed could not make up his mind whether to ask him point blank what the score was or to try to draw the truth out of him by subtle questioning.

They had walked about half a block when a little black dog pounced out of a doorway and came running toward them lickety-split. It was Mr. Ewalding's dog, Mopsie, and she was a great friend of Ed's because he always petted her and occasionally gave her a handful of crackers from his lunch bucket.

Mopsie was no more than three feet away when she stopped suddenly, nearly tripping over her ears. Her legs stiffened, her hackles rose and her lips curled away from her teeth. She growled—not the type of growl you would expect from a thoroughly domestic spaniel—but a deep-throated, savage sound that made Ed step back in alarm.

Mr. Kraken paused for a moment. "Do not be frightened," he told Ed. "The beast will not attack us."

Ed wasn't so sure. The white savagery in Mopsie's eyes reminded him of a mad dog he had seen shot when he was a kid. There was an instant when she looked like she might spring; then her tail swished down like a semaphore, and she raced for home, howling as she ran.

"Dogs," said Mr. Kraken, "do not like me."

Ed could believe that, but he could not figure out why the very sight of Mr. Kraken should make Mopsie turn into a canine lunatic. "I'm very fond of animals," he said.

"Why?" asked Mr. Kraken. "All animal life is predatory: the higher forms feeding upon the lower. If you were hungry enough, starving, let us say—you would look upon the dog differently."

"Could be." Ed gave a forced chuckle, hoping that Mr. Kraken was merely indulging in a little gruesome jocularity. He found nothing in Mr. Kraken's chalky countenance to encourage that hope.

They came to the corner drug store, and Ed happened to glance sideways, toward the drug store window. Something was wrong. Ed couldn't figure it out immediately, but he knew something was wrong. It had to do with the drug store window.

"Here's where I get my cigarettes," said Ed. "See you later."

"Good night, sir," said Mr. Kraken, with a small bow.

As Mr. Kraken walked away, Ed turned toward the window again. He saw what it was this time, and his legs became rubbery. He leaned against a lamp post, just staring at the glass.

ED'S IMAGE was plainly visible in the window, but Mr. Kraken's image was missing. Mr. Kraken had walked between Ed and the window—*and he had cast no* reflection.

The truth hit Ed like a sledgehammer—made him so weak he nearly folded on the spot. He had seen it in the movies, heard it on the radio, read about it in books; but he never really believed it could be true. He knew, though, that there is only one creature who does not cast a reflection in a glass.

No doubt about it—Mr. Kraken was a vampire.

Ed was considerably worried when he reached home. Having a vampire for a

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roomer was not the most customery occurrence in the world, and he could not decide offhand how to deal with the problem. It is somewhat to Ed's credit that, when the first shock had passed, he approached the problem with the same scientific detachment that might be expected of a zoologist who had just found a sabre-tooth tiger living in his backyard. Ed realized, first of all, the value of his discovery. A real, dead vampire —brought to the limelight—would be worth ten times as much as a live sabre-toothed tiger. Of course there was a certain amount of danger; but vampires, like tigers, could be handled. Having studied the subject extensively, Ed knew all the approved methods.

At this point it may be well to explain that Ed Jacobs was just as excited as anybody else would be under similar circumstances, but it was much like the excitement people experience upon meeting their favorite movie star face to face. Ed had seen so many vampires on the screen and heard so many of them on the radio that he was entirely familiar with their peculiarities

Vampires, he knew, prowled only at night, nourishing themselves on the blood of some unfortunate victim. From dawn to sunset they remained dead as fence posts, anchored to their earthly remains. Therefore, while Mr. Kraken was supposedly turning out blueprints at the shipyard, he was really roaming the streets of Brooklyn with an eye out for some luckless individual's corpuscles. During the day—instead of sleeping in the spare room—he was quietly mouldering in a secret sepulchre.

Ed decided not to mention his discovery to Ellen. He remembered the time a man had been sideswiped by a beer truck and Ellen had him brought into the parlor until the ambulance arrived. The man recovered in two days, but Ellen was a total wreck for a week, worrying about him. She invariably went to pieces whenever anything upset the well-ordered routine of her life. Ed was more rugged.

Next day, Ed was so preoccupied he missed out on three sure-fire sales, and he undercharged a lady forty-nine cents on a glass coffee pot. Mr. Cash sensed that something was wrong, but mistook it for the flu and sent him home an hour early.

A note was waiting for him on top of the radio. It read:

"Ed dear,

"Mother has had another one of her spells. I tried to call you at the store but the line was busy twice. I am leaving for East Orange and will be gone a couple of weeks probably. That's all the longer they usually last. You will find meat and milk in the ice box. You have plenty of clean shirts and if I am going to stay longer I will let you know. Don't forget to collect the rent from Mr. Kraken.

"Love, Ellen"

ED WAS neither surprised nor displeased. Ellen's mother had had these spells before—always when there was spring housecleaning or heavy sewing to be done. It couldn't have been timed better. Now he could study Mr. Kraken like a scientist studies an ameba—without anyone looking over his shoulder. Furthermore, there might be a certain amount of personal risk, and he was glad Ellen was out of it.

The house was as silent as a well-managed mortuary. Ed went upstairs, took a skeleton key from his pocket and opened the door to Mr. Kraken's room. The shades were still drawn, and slender fingers of sunlight crept beneath them, clutching at the window sill. There wasn't much time. Mr. Kraken would probably put in an appearance soon after sunset.

Ed entered the room, trying to look in all directions at once. The place smelled musty, the chair seat was covered with dust and the chenille bedspread was as smooth as when Ellen had first laid it. Opposite the bed was an old-fashioned bureau with drawers on each side and a full length mirror in the middle. Ed looked into the drawers and found them empty. Opening the clothes closet, he discovered only a bunch of unused hangers and an indolent spider. Then his eye fell on the small suitcase Mr. Kraken had brought with him; it was lying flat beneath the bed. He pulled the suitcase out and opened it. Nothing inside but the manufacturer's inspection ticket. Mr. Kraken had evidently purchased the suitcase so that he would not arouse suspicion by moving into the room without any luggage.

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As Ed snapped the suitcase shut, he noticed that the fingers of sunlight had slipped away from the window sill. Then he noticed something else, and his Adam's apple gave a sudden leap, nearly choking him.

Mr. Kraken was watching him from the doorway.

Ed tried his best to look like a man waiting for a street car and succeeded miserably. He got up off the floor and said, "Home early tonight, aren't you?"

"*Hak!*" said Mr. Kraken. His eyes had a carnivorous gleam, and the skin over his high cheekbones appeared so transparent that the form of a skull seemed visible behind it.

Ed stole a quick look at the bureau mirror. According to the mirror, there was no Mr. Kraken—nothing but an empty doorway.

"Why did you do that?" demanded Mr. Kraken.

"Do—what?" Ed did not like the expression on Mr. Kraken's face. It reminded him of a mandrill he had once seen at the Bronx zoo.

"The brute had glowered at him broodingly, as though the crowning achievement of its career would be to break him into small pieces and then jump on the fragments with both feet.

"I wonder why that mirror should interest you so greatly?" Mr. Kraken said, smiling. It was the first time Ed had ever seen him smile. His teeth were white and shiny, and four of them were regular tusks. He moved forward with his fingers outstretched, as if itching for the feel of Ed's throat.

"Stay where you are!" Ed reached into his vest pocket, withdrew a small brownish bottle and waggled it at Mr. Kraken threateningly.

"Wolf's-bane!" Mr. Kraken recoiled like a stepped-on snake.

"You guessed it," said Ed, his confidence sweeping back. "I figured you would."

"Why?"

"Because you're a vampire, that's why. Now, don't deny it."

MR. KRAKEN looked crestfallen. "Why should I deny it?" he said sullenly. "There's no disgrace in being a vampire. Vampirism is strictly hereditary, and I come from a long line of distinguished vampires."

"I don't hold it against you," said Ed. "Only I don't want you prowling around the neighborhood scaring people to death—"

"How did you find out about me?"

"It was easy," said Ed. "I've been to a lot of movies which featured vampires, and I've studied their weak points. I also read Professor Faust's book on the subject—which I have, in case you'd like to borrow it. When I learned what you were, I knew just what to do. I got the druggist to give me some tincture of aconite, which is made from wolf's-bane. As long as I keep it in my pocket, you can't lay a hand on me."

"That's true," Mr. Kraken admitted resentfully.

"Tell me about yourself," Ed urged. "How did you get in this deplorable condition?"

"It was easy," said Mr. Kraken. "I died."

"Of naturel causes, I hope?"

"I was murdered," stated Mr. Kraken. "Murdered in this very house."

Ed was flabbergasted. "That's not possible!" he exclaimed.

"No?" Mr. Kraken exposed his upper tusks in a smug grimace. "Didn't you buy this house from a man called Benjamin Schlik?"

"That's right," Ed nodded. "He was leaving for Arizona for his health."

"*Hak!*" Mr. Kraken made that unpleasant noise again. "Schlik's real name is Joseph Guloff. He is the man who had me murdered."

"He seemed like such a nice little guy too," mused Ed.

"I was Guloff's partner, and he did not wish to divide fifty thousand dollars with me," continued Mr. Kraken. "I know he is still in town, and I will walk the streets every night until I find him. Then I will drain every drop of blood from his fat carcass."

Ed shuddered. "I beg your pardon," he said delicately, "but are your—er—earthly remains located in this house?"

"They are," replied Mr. Kraken. "And I know just what you are thinking. You want to find out where I am buried, so you can get rid of me. A stake through the heart is

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the most conventional way—or perhaps you would rather scatter my dust over the sea?"

"Oh, no," protested Ed. "That was the farthest thing from my mind."

"Then let it remain so," said Mr. Kraken harshly. "I intend to be your guest for a long, long time."

So speaking, he swished his coat around himself and vanished down the hall like a swift shadow.

ON THE following evening Ed went up to Mr. Kraken's room again and sat on the bed, waiting. Sure enough, shortly after sundown, Mr. Kraken appeared.

"I want you to keep out of here," Mr. Kraken said severely. "I've paid my rent like a human being, and I insist upon being treated like one."

"Did you find Guloff last night?" Ed asked.

"That's my business," snapped Mr. Kraken. "Let me warn you—it infuriates me to have anyone pry into my affairs."

"You know," said Ed pensively, "if I were in your condition, I'd forget about Guloff. A guy in your condition could pick up some cash for himself."

"I'm not interested in money," Mr. Kraken replied. "I've found that it is of no use to you after you're dead."

"But you're only dead during the daytime—"

"Nevertheless, it changes one's attitude considerably," Mr. Kraken informed him. "The only thing I hunger for is blood; fresh, warm blood."

"Naturally," Ed agreed. "But I think you could cure yourself of that uncouth craving if you put your mind to it. Have you ever wanted to go on the radio?"

"Certainly not," bristled Mr. Kraken.

"With your voice you'd be a natural for one of those midnight to dawn record programs," asserted Ed. "However, that would only be the beginning. With me handling the business end of it, we'd—"

"No!" Mr. Kraken exclaimed harshly. "Now get out of here before I tear your heart from your body and eat it before your eyes!"

Ed replied by patting the bulge in his vest pocket. That little bottle of wolf's-bane made him feel as secure as if he were watching Boris Karloff from the third row of the Lyric Theater. "You can't scare me," he said. "No, sir, not one little bit. You might as well realize, Mr. Kraken, that I have big plans for you and they don't include letting you run wild on the streets and getting me into all sorts of trouble."

"I will not be exploited!" Mr. Kraken's voice sounded like someone trying to rip up a board.

"Who's exploiting you?" countered Ed. "With a puss like yours, you could put Karloff and Lugosi out of business. I'll guarantee you a movie contract within—"

"And I'll guarantee you something else," interrupted Mr. Kraken. "Guloff shall be my first victim, but you will be the second. Some evening I shall find you without that bottle of wolf's-bane on your person. When that time comes—*hak!*" He rattled his teeth horribly.

Ed was a little disappointed in Mr. Kraken's attitude; but, having made a specialty of selling people things they didn't want, he had supreme confidence in his powers of persuasion. Mr. Kraken always came to the spare room soon after sundown, and for three consecutive nights Ed was on hand to greet him. Ed tried every angle he knew, but, instead of improving, Mr. Kraken's attitude became increasingly hostile. He finally decided there was just one more method of persuasion left: force. He could threaten to destroy him.

In order to do this he would have to find out where the remains were located. The cellar was the most likely place, but he had already inspected it carefully, without finding anything.

The next day Ed stayed home from work and went over the house with a fine-toothed comb. He even pulled up the flooring on the back porch and tore out part of the bathroom wall. In the end he was convinced more than ever that Mr. Kraken was somewhere in the cellar.

Toward sundown he hid in the cellar behind a packing box. The place was dank and musty, and a big spider was sitting in a web in front of the small window which fronted the street, at sidewalk level. Slowly, the sunlight faded away from the window, and the cellar became dark. Then a street light went on, casting a yellow light into

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the cellar. Ed could see the outline of the furnace, the big spider—nothing else.

It became late. Ed had been tensely expectant when the sun went down, but now, after waiting at least an hour, he began to wonder if anything was going to happen. Perhaps he had guessed wrong. Mr. Kraken usually put in an appearance before now.

THERE was a sudden rustling noise—as if mice had gotten into the furnace. Ed's vertebrae seemed to crawl down his back like a cobra. The furnace door rattled for a second on its hinges; creaked open.

It looked at first like black smoke issuing from the furnace; then it oozed together the way a chocolate pudding does when you cook it long enough—and there was Mr. Kraken.

Mr. Kraken stood motionless for a long time, and the yellow light cutting across his face made him look particularly repulsive. Finally, with silent footsteps, he moved toward the spot where Ed was hidden. Ed sucked in a deep breath and held it until Mr. Kraken went on up the stairs. After hearing the cellar door open and close, he followed quietly.

Mr. Kraken went straight to the front of the house. He opened the front door, and Ed saw him bend down and pick up a white object which lay on the doorsill. Ed gave Mr. Kraken a quarter-of-a-block head start, then trailed behind him, hugging buildings wherever possible.

They walked a long ways — about five miles, Ed figured. They were somewhere in the vicinity of the East River when Mr. Kraken stopped in front of a saggy, three-story building that had an abandoned pool hall on the lower floor. A sign overhanging the sidewalk read, "Export Street Hotel."

Ed ducked into a doorway and then peered out like an inquisitive cat. Except for Mr. Kraken, the street was deserted. The telephone wires made crackling noises, and a boat whistle moaned out on the river.

Mr. Kraken stood still as a stone gargoyle; then, with remarkable agility, he went straight up the wall.

He went up swiftly and easily—very much like a spider on a thread. Ed could hardly believe his eyes. One minute Mr. Kraken was there on the sidewalk, and the next, he was up on a third story window sill. A sickish feeling assaulted Ed's middle as he saw Mr. Kraken shove up the sash and step inside. Somebody was about to meet a ghastly end, and Ed felt more than certain that the luckless individual was Joe Guloff.

While he was wondering what to do about it, a shrill cry emanated from the upper portion of the hotel. It was quite a horrible noise, and it made him turn cold all over. He ran up to the hotel entrance and found the door locked. All he could see was a flight of stairs and a dim light globe sticking out of the bare wall. He rang the night bell, hammered on the door pane; but got no reply. A tougher character than Ed Jacobs might have smashed in the door, but Ed was a great respecter of other people's doors and, besides he had no desire to become suspiciously involved in a murder. What Ed wanted most was a cop.

IT WAS one of those dockside neighborhoods full of bleak-faced warehouses and deserted lumberyards, and the nearest outpost of human activity was a small beer joint about three blocks up the street. A juke box was bellowing at the top of its audio-control when Ed barged into the place. Grabbing a wall phone, Ed inserted a nickel and yelled for the police station. He got a quick connection.

"I want to report a murder!" he shouted at the voice which answered.

"Yes? What address, please?" The voice at the other end sounded tired and disinterested.

"Export Street Hotel. There's a man there named Joe Guloff—"

"Joe Guloff, did you say?"

"Joe Guloff," Ed repeated. "I don't think he's dead yet, but you'd better hurry!"

"And what is *your* name?" The voice had suddenly acquired an inquisitorial ring, like Mr. District Attorney.

Ed told him.

"Address?"

Ed told him that too.

"There's nothing to worry about, Mr. Jacobs," said the voice considerately. "The squad car's on its way. There'll be some questioning, of course; but don't hide anything. It'll be to your advantage to tell all you know."

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"Yessir," said Ed. He wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, went over to the bar and ordered a double bourbon with a lemon peel.

Pretty soon two police cars came screaming down the street, and their sirens subsided to a growl as they pulled up in front of the Export Street Hotel. Ed stayed at the bar, crunching a pretzel thoughtfully. What could he tell them? The whole truth and nothing but the truth about Mr. Kraken? No. There wasn't a cop in New York City who'd believe him.

He drained his drink, chewed a moment on the lemon peel and started back toward the hotel. A sizeable crowd had gathered in the street; policemen were shouting. An ambulance slid around the corner.

A cold breeze seemed to touch the back of his neck. He turned and saw Mr. Kraken standing behind him.

"Why did you call them?" demanded Mr. Kraken wolfishly. "Answer me!"

"Murder is not my idea of good clean fun," said Ed reproachfully. "Did you kill him?"

Mr. Kraken's mandible worked up and down like the jaw of a snake. "I only needed a few more moments. Miserable, meddling idiot!"

"You listen to me," said Ed, shaking his forefinger sternly. "From now on, blood-snatching is distinctly out. Either you will toe the mark and embark upon some honest enterprise, or I will shovel the ashes out of my furnace and chuck them into the river. You see—" he added, "—I know where the body's buried."

Mr. Kraken's face twitched in a dozen places. He sighed bitterly. "When I first came back to this world, I was full of high hopes. I had been a failure in life, but I felt certain I had all the requisites of an admirable vampire. I've failed again."

"You're just beginning," Ed told him. "We'll go down to the police station and tell them who you are. Once the story hits the papers, you'll be famous—"

"I won't do it!" Mr. Kraken exclaimed in a shrill voice. "I won't be hounded by you!"

"Now, see here—" Before he could get any further, Ed found he was talking to space.

Mr. Kraken had vanished.

The crowd was dispersing by this time, and the police cars were wheeling away. Ed went to a hotel that night because he knew the police would be waiting to question him when he got home. He didn't want to lie; but how could he make them believe his story? He rolled and tossed all night trying to think of a solution. It came to him about six a.m. The police might not believe him, but they would certainly listen to that eminent scholar and authority on the supernatural, Professor Matthew Faust.

ED LOOKED up Professor Faust that morning. The professor was an oldish gentleman with a large nose and a bemused manner that made you think of a barn owl. He appeared pleased when Ed told him he had read his book. "So few persons are interested in the study of hyperphysical phenomena," he remarked. "What part of the book did you find most interesting?"

"The chapter on vampires," Ed told him. "I've got one living at my house."

"I beg pardon?" frowned Professor Faust.

"That's why I came to you for help," said Ed. He started right from the beginning and told old Professor Faust everything. The professor seemed puzzled at first, and by the time Ed had finished the narrative he looked downright alarmed.

"The police wouldn't believe me if I told 'em about Mr. Kraken," Ed concluded. "That's why I want you to help me. What do you say?"

Professor Faust moved toward the door gingerly. "I would say, sir, that you are a sick man. I suggest that you—er—see a psychiatrist immediately."

Ed was stunned. "*You*—don't believe me?"

"I'm afraid you took my book too literally. It was meant to be a compilation of primitive superstitions and folklore—"

"And you think I'm nuts because I believed what you wrote!"

"The power of autosuggestion often brings on hallucinations. According to Freud—"

Ed got out of there as fast as he could. He was disappointed, disillusioned and hopping mad. There was now only one thing to do. He would sneak into the house about

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sundown, find Mr. Kraken and threaten him with certain extinction if he didn't make a clean breast of things to the police. It might work.

Having some time to kill, Ed went to Central Park and spent the afternoon feeding squirrels. It was hot, so he took off his coat and vest and snoozed a while in the sunshine.

He reached home shortly after dark, sneaking down the alley and entering through the back door to avoid any cops who might be posted near the house. Climbing the back stairway, he went straight to the spare room and sat on the bed, waiting for Mr. Kraken to appear. An hour passed, and nothing happened. Ed had waited for Mr. Kraken before, but this time he was extraordinarily nervous. The longer he waited, the more he began to suspect that Professor Faust might be right. Maybe he *was* crazy. Maybe Mr. Kraken was nothing but an hallucination after all. All those horror movies he had seen might have brought it on. He made up his mind never to see another one again.

Then he heard a creaking door downstairs and the sound of moving footsteps, and he felt better. Mr. Kraken was coming! He was real, after all.

Ed stood up. A spindly moon cast a faint beam across the bedspread. He did not see the door open, nor see it close, but all of a sudden he noticed a black figure standing in front of the bureau.

"You're late," said Ed.

Mr. Kraken did not reply. A pair of shiny eyes glared into Ed's face.

At that moment he sensed something wrong. He placed his hand against his stomach for reassurance, feeling for the little bottle he always kept in his vest.

*His vest was gone.* He had left it hanging on the bench in the park.

Ed tried to speak, but the words clogged his throat. All he could see was those terrible eyes and the black shadow that remained as stiffly frozen as himself. Without that protective bottle of wolf's-bane he was as helpless as a rabbit in front of a boa constrictor.

Sucking down a deep breath, Ed took a jittery step toward the door. The black figure moved toward the door also. He envisioned those terrible tusks slavering for his throat. Sweat trickled down the bridge of his nose, and his mouth tasted salty.

He clenched his fists; bolted for the hall. He managed to reach the top of the front stairs, grabbed for the rail and lost his balance. His forward momentum, combined with the pull of gravity, sent him looping through the air like a projectile from a well-aimed mortar. He landed on his back somewhere in the vicinity of the bottom newel post.

The impact knocked out his wind and made him feel as if he were being pushed around in a revolving door. The whirling sensation ceased—and he became conscious of a pair of icy hands creeping about his throat.

Ed let out a shriek that would have made a banshee run for cover. He struck out with both fists, and his knuckles sank into something paunchy.

"Ed—stop it! Ed!"

HE OPENED his eyes and saw Ellen standing beside him. A jug-shaped policeman leaned against the stair rail, clutching his midriff and groaning mightily. It was Sergeant O'Callahan of the Flatbush Detail.

"What's wrong with you, Ed?" Ellen asked, massaging his neck again. "What happened?"

"He—tried to kill me—" Ed faltered. "He caught me without my bottle—"

"Looks like he had too much of the bottle," growled Sergeant O'Callahan.

"The police have been looking for you all day," said Ellen.

"I figured they would be," sighed Ed. "It was lucky they reached Joe Guloff in time."

"I'll say it was," nodded Sergeant O'Callahan. "We rounded up the whole gang. They were usin' the hotel as a hideout."

"What gang?" frowned Ed.

"Guloff's gang, to be sure. We've been lookin' for them ever since they heisted the shipyard payroll. What we want to know is how you knew where they were hiding?"

Ed remained on the floor for a few seconds, just looking stupid. Finally he crawled to his feet. "I didn't know Guloff was a gangster," he said. "I called the

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cops because I thought he was being murdered."

"Yeah?" The sergeant scratched the back of his bristly scalp. "Guloff claimed he was bein' murdered, too. He was so weak he couldn't walk, and when we got him to the station house he went absolutely berserk—like a crazy man. Kept yellin' about some guy who used to be his partner—guy by the name of McCracken."

"Kraken," said Ed. "I found out that Mr. Kraken was going to kill Guloff and I followed him to the Export Street Hotel."

"Mr. Kraken is our roomer," Ellen explained. "Ed never liked him from the first."

"Where's he now?" the policeman asked.

"I—think he may be—upstairs," Ed stammered.

"That we'll soon discover." Sergeant O'Callahan took a large, dangerous-looking weapon from his holster and started up the staircase with it.

"I think Mr. Kraken's gone," Ellen whispered to Ed. "I looked into his room this morning, and all his things were gone—"

"This morning? When did you come home?" Ed was surprised to see her all over again.

"About nine," she said. "Didn't you get my special delivery letter? Oh, you must have—or you wouldn't have hired the man to clean out the furnace."

"The what?"

"The furnace. A man came and cleaned it out. He said you phoned him late last night and hired him to do it. He charged me fifteen dollars."

"You mean—he cleaned *everything* out of the furnace?"

"I saw to it that he did a good job," she nodded. "He said you insisted that he dump the ashes in the river."

"Best place in the world to dump ashes."

"Oh, sure—the river," said Ed groggily.

Then it came to him. He recalled how Mr. Kraken had picked up something just before leaving the house last night. Ellen's letter—they always left specials under the door. Mr. Kraken knew that Ellen would be home next day, so he had gone and called the furnace man. It was the same as suicide.

But if Mr. Kraken was now peacefully at rest in the bottom of the river, whom had Ed seen in the spare room not less than fifteen minutes ago?

Ed hurried up the stairs and nearly knocked over Sergeant O'Callahan, who was coming down. He stepped into the dark room and was immediately confronted by a shadowy figure that seemed to grow larger as he moved toward it. He clicked on the light and found himself looking into the big bureau mirror—looking at his own image! He had nearly scared himself to death on account of something that wasn't there.

"He's not here, lad," said Sergeant O'Callahan. "We'll pick him up before long. And as for yourself—I'll see to it personally that you get what's coming to you."

"Get what?"

"The reward. There's a twenty-seven hundred dollar reward for information leading to the arrest and capture of Joe Guloff. I thought you knew."

"That's wonderful!" exulted Ellen. "Now you can buy into Mr. Cash's business. Aren't you glad we let Mr. Kraken have the spare room?"

Ed's legs wobbled. He had to go sit on the bed.

Ed Jacobs says he has investigated the matter thoroughly, and he is satisfied beyond the shadow of a doubt that the furnace man dumped the ashes into the river some place below Greenpoint. Therefore, if you are ever in Brooklyn and you see a tall, gaunt man in a long overcoat following you some night, there is nothing to be worried about. It couldn't possibly be Mr. Kraken.

Still—you never can tell.

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# Weirditties

By BOK and NICHOL

1

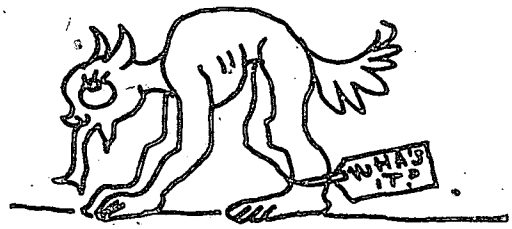
A SKELETON in a dark closet
Left the house to make a deposit
In a phantoms' cloud bank.
All his savings he sank:
A lizard, a bat, and a what's-it.

3

A werewolf who wanted a craw full
Of sweet candy, choked on a jawful;
He howled in despair
As he clawed at the air,
"Oh, I should have kept on eating offal!"

5

A seeress devoted to science
Invented the weirdest appliance!
She'd turn on the switch
And the walls would unhitch,
And specters would scare out her clients!

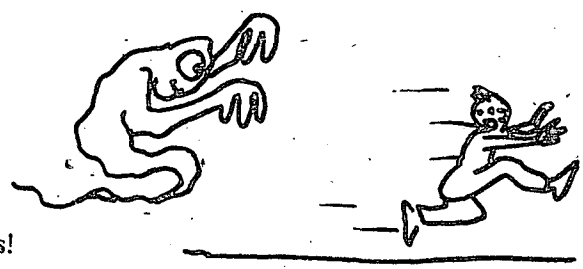



2

There was a sly vampire named Burns
Who liked to collect Grecian urns.
When asked what he did
With his urns, he backslid
By saying he filled them with ferns.

4

There once was a girl-ghoul named Tillie
Who thought dining on bodies was silly.
"My goodness!" said she,
"I'd much rather have three
Hot dogs, or a bowlful of chili!"





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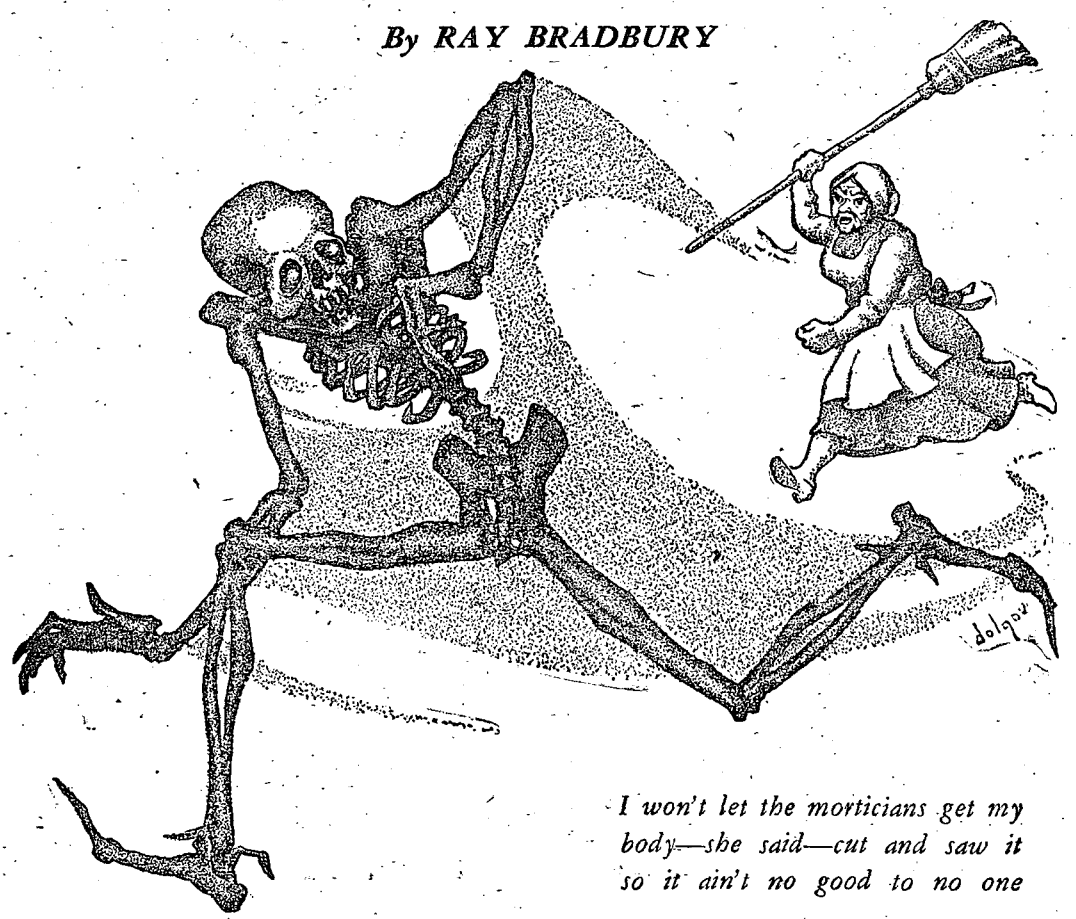
# There Was An Old Woman

*By RAY BRADBURY*




*I won't let the morticians get my body—she said—cut and saw it so it ain't no good to no one*

"NO, THERE'S no leif arguing. I got my mind fixed. You sashay off with your silly wicker basket. Land, Land, where you ever get notions like that? You just skit out of here and don't bother me, I got my tatting and knitting to do, and no never minds about tall dark gentlemen with fangled ideas."

The tall dark young man stood quietly, not moving. Aunt Tildy hurried on with her talk.

"You *heard* what I said, young man. If you got a mind to speechify me, well, you can talk, but meantime I hope you don't mind if I pour myself a bit of coffee. There. If you'd been a bit more polite, I mighta offered you some; but you stride in here high and mighty and you never rapped on the door no nothing. I don't like that kind of doing. You think you *own* the place."

Aunt Tildy fussed with her lap. "Land, now, where'd I lay the yarn. I'm making myself a comforter. These winters gets on mighty chill, I'll allow, and it ain't fittin' for a lady with bones like rice-paper to be settin' in a drafty old house like this without warming herself."

The tall dark man sat down.

"That's an antique chair, so be gentle

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV



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with it," warned Aunt Tildy. "Now, if you want to start again, tell me what you got to tell, I'll listen respectful. But keep your voice down and stop staring at me with funny lights in your eyes. Land, it gives me shudders."

The grandfather clock in the hall had just finished striking three. There were four men out in the hall grouped around the wicker, strangely quiet and hardly moving, like they were frozen.

"Now, about that wicker basket," began Aunt. It's over six feet long, and by the look of it, it ain't laundry. And those four men you got with you, you don't need them —why, it's light as thistles. Eh?"

The dark young man was leaning forward on the antique chair. He said, "The basket won't be light after awhile. There'll be something in it."

"Shaw, now." Aunt Tildy mused. "Now where have I seen a wicker like that before? Seems it was only a couple years ago. Seems to me—oh. Now I remembers. Certainly I do. It was when Mrs. Dwyer passed away next door."

Aunt Tildy put her coffee cup down, sternly. "So that's what you're up to? I thought you were trying to sell me something. Just wait until my little Emily comes home from college this afternoon. I wrote her a note the other day. Not admitting, of course, that I wasn't feeling quite ripe and pert, but sort of hinting that I'd like to see her again, it's been a bunch of weeks. She living in New York and all. Almost like my own daughter, Emily is.

"Now, she'll take care of you. She'll shoo you out'n this parlor so quick it'll—"

"Aren't you tired?" asked the dark young man.

"No, I'm not."

"It would be so nice for you to rest," said the dark young man.

"Great sons of Gosehen on the Gilbery Dike! I got a hundred comforters, two hundreds of sweaters and six hundred pot-holders left in these skinny fingers fumbling with clicking needles and bright yarns. You go away and come back when I'm done. and maybe I'll talk to you." Aunt Tildy shifted subjects. "Let me tell you about Emily. She's such a sweet, fair child."

Aunt Tildy nodded thoughtfully. Emily. With hair like the tassles of light yellow corn, just as soft and sweet.

"I well remember the day her mother died, twenty years ago, leaving Emily to my house. That's why I'm mad at you and your wicker baskets an sech goings-on. Who ever heard of people dying for any good cause. Young man, I don't *like* it. Why, I remember—"

Aunt Tildy paused, a brief memory of pain touching her heart. She remembered 25 years ago, and her father's voice back in that old fragment of time:

"Tildy," he'd said, "what are you going to do in life? The way you act, men don't have much with you. Nothing permanent, I mean. You kiss and run. You don't settle down and raise children."

"Papa," Tildy snapped right back at him. "I likes laughing and playing and singing, but I'm not the marrying kind. You know why?"

"Why?" asked Papa.

"I can't find a man who has my philosophy, Papa."

"What philosophy is that?"

"That death is silly. And it is. It took away Mama when we needed her most of all. Now, do you call that intelligent?"

PAPA looked at her and his eyes got wet and gray and bleak. He patted her shoulder. "You're always right, Tildy. But what can we do? Death comes to everybody?"

"Fight back," she cried. "Strike it below the belt. Fight it. Don't believe in it!"

"It can't be done," said Papa, sadly. "You're all alone in the world."

"There's got to be a beginning somewhere. I'm beginning my own philosophy here and now," Tildy declared. "Why, it's just silly that people live a couple years and then are dropped like a wet seed in a hole and nothing sprouts but a smell. What good do they do that way? They lay there a million years, doing no good for nobody. Most of 'em fine, nice and neat people, or at least trying."

So, after a few years, Papa died. Aunt Tildy remembered how she had tried to talk him out of it, but he passed on anyway. Then she ran away. She couldn't stay with him after he was dead. He was a denial of

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her philosophy. She didn't attend his burial. She didn't do anything but set up this antique shop on the front of this old house and live alone for years, that is until Emily came.

Tildy didn't want to take the girl in. Why? Because Emily believed in dying. But her mother was an old friend, and Tildy had promised.

"Emily," continued Aunt Tildy, to the man in black, "was the first person to live in this house with me in years. I never got married. I didn't like the idea of living with a man for twenty-thirty year and then have him up and die on me. It would shake my philosophy down like a house of cards. I shied away from the world pretty much. I guess I got pretty persnickety at people if they ever so much as mentioned death to me."

The young man politely interrupted now, and took up Aunt Tildy's story for her in even, calm and quiet tones:

"All through the last World War, as I recall, you never read a newspaper. You beat a man over the head with your umbrella and drove him from your shop, when he insisted on telling you about the battle of the Argonne.

"When radio came in, you stuck by your old phonograph. You played the nice old records. Harry Lauder singing Roamin' in the Gloamin', and Madame Schumann-Heink with her lullabies. As the years passed, you tried to teach Emily, but her mind was made up about—certain things. She was nice enough to respect your way of thinking, and she never mentioned—morbid—things."

Aunt Tildy sniffed. "Think you're smart, huh? How you know all those things?" She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, now, if you think you can come and talk me into that silly wicker basket, you're way off the trestle. If you so much as lay a hand on me I'll spit *right in* your face!"

The young man smiled. Aunt Tildy sniffed again.

"Now, you don't have to simper at me like a sick dog. I'm too old to be made love at. That's all twisted dry, like an old tube of paint, and left behind in the years."

There was a noise. The clock in the hall struck three. Strange. It seemed to Aunt Tildy that it had just done that once before, a moment ago. She liked the old clock. Ivory and ebony with gold angels hanging naked around the face of it. Nice tone. Like cathedral chimes sounding softly.

"Are you just going to sit there, young man?"

"I am."

"Then you won't mind if I take a nap. Just a little cat nap. Now, don't you get up off that chair. You set right there. You set there and don't come creeping round me, toddying. Just gonna close my eyes for a wee bit. That's right. That's right. . . ."

Nice and cool and restful time of day. No noise. Silence. Just the clock a ticking away busy as termites in wood. Just the old room smelling of polished mahogany and leather in the morris chair, and books sitting stiff on the shelves. So nice.

*You aren't getting up from the chair, are you, Mister? Better not. I got one eye open for you. Yes, indeed I have. Yes, I have. Oh. Ah. Hmm.*

So nice. So drowsy. So quiet. Oh, so nice.

Who's that moving around in the dark with my eyes closed?

Who's that kissing my cheek? That you, Emily? No. No. Guess it was my imagination. Only—dreaming. Land, yes, that's what it is. Drifting off, off, off. . . .

AH? WHAT SAY? OH!

"Just a moment while I put on my glasses. There."

The clock, unpredictably, still said only a few minutes after three. Shame, old clock. Have to have it fixed.

The young man in dark clothing stood near the door. Aunt Tildy nodded her head.

"You leaving so soon, young man? Good thing. Emily's coming home and she'd fix you. Had to give up, didn't you? Couldn't convince me, could you? I'm mule-stubborn. You couldn't get me out of this house, nosirree. Well, young man, you needn't bother coming back to try again."

The young man bowed with slow dignity.

"I have no intention of coming again. Never."

"Fine," declared Aunt Tildy. "I always told Papa I'd win out. Why, I'm gonna sit here by this window and knit for the next

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thousand years. They'll have to rip its boards down around me to get me out."

The dark young man was smiling funny.

"Why you smirking?" demanded Aunt Tildy. "You just get out, and quit looking like the cat that ate the canary. And you tote that old fool wicker basket with you."

The four men were already treading heavily out the front door. Aunt Tildy studied the way they handled the basket. It wasn't heavy, and yet they were staggering under its weight.

"Here, now!" Aunt Tildy arose in tremulous indignation. "Did you steal something from my antique shop? My books." She glanced about concernedly. "No. The clocks? No. What you got in that wicker?"

"Curious?" asked the young man, softly.

"Curious? Me? Shaw, no. Get out. Get it outa here!"

"Good-by."

"Good-by to you, too. Go away!"

THE door closed. That was better. Gone. Darned fool men with their funny ideas. No never minds about the wicker. If they stole something, she didn't care, as long as they let her be.

"Here now," said Aunt Tildy, pleased. "Here comes Emily home from college. About time. Lovely girl, walking along. But, Lord, the girl looks pale and funny today. Walking so slow. I wonder why. Looks worried, she does. Poor girl. Tired, maybe. I'll just hustle her up a pot of coffee and a tray of cakes."

Emily came up the front steps. While Aunt Tildy was bustling around, she could hear the slow, deliberative steps. What ails the girl, thought Tildy. Didn't sound like she had no more spunk than a dead lizard. The door opened in front. Emily stood out in the hall. Why didn't she come in? Funny girl.

"Oh, Emily?" called Aunt Tildy.

Emily came walking in.

"Oh, there you are, Emily. I been waiting for you to come. There was the darndest fool men roaming about in here with a wicker basket, and a young man who tried talking me into something I didn't want. You just missed them. Glad you're home. Makes it right cozy—"

Aunt Tildy stopped talking. She realized that for a full minute Emily had been staring at her. Staring hard.

"Emily. What's wrong? Why you looking at me like that, Emily? Stop your staring? Here, now, I'll bring you a cup of coffee. There.

"Emily, why you backing away from me?

"Emily, stop screaming, child. Stop screaming, Emily! Stop screaming! You keep screaming, like that, you go crazy. Emily, get up off the floor, get away from that wall, cringing, Emily! Emily, stop screaming, screaming, child! I won't hurt you.

"Land, if it ain't one thing it's another.

"Emily, what's *WRONG*, child. . . ?"

EMILY groaned and put her hands up to her face.

"Emily, child, here now. Sip this water. Here now, child. That's it."

Emily opened her eyes, stared, and then shut them, quivering, and pulled back. "Oh, Aunt Tildy. Oh."

"Stop that!" Aunt Tildy slapped her. "What ails you?"

Emily forced herself to look upon Tildy again.

She thrust out her young fingers and they vanished inside of Aunt Tildy.

"What fool notion thing are you messing with!" cried Tildy, surprised. "Take your hand away! Take it away, I say!"

Emily trembled again and turned away her head, shaking her golden hair into shining temblors. "You're not here, you're gone. Oh, you're gone. Oh, you're gone. I'm just dreaming."

"You're not dreaming. Hush, baby. Lands of Ghoshen!"

"You're dead. Oh, it's awful. You're dead. You CAN'T be here."

This sort of talk upset Tildy a great deal. She took Emily's hand and it passed clean through her lacy bosom. Instantly, Aunt Tildy raged to her feet, stomping them.

"Why—why—" she muttered angrily, "that—that fibber, that liar—that sneak-thief!" Her thin hands knotted into wiry hard pale fists. "That dark, dark fiend! He stole it, he stole it! He took it away, he did, oh, he did, he did! Why, I—" She could find no words to symbolize the steaming wrath within her. Her pale blue eyes were

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fire. She spluttered off into an indignant silence. Then she turned to Emily. "Child, get up off that floor. I need your help. Get up, now!"

Emily lay there, shivering.

"All right," declared Aunt Tildy. "PART of me is here. By the Lord Harry, what's left of me will have to do, momentarily. Now stop gawking and fetch my cloak and bonnet!"

Emily confessed. "I'm—scared. I'm—so scared."

Aunt Tildy planted fists on bustled hips. "Is you scared of me?"

"Yes."

"Why? I'm no booger. I'm just me. You known me most of your life. Now's no time to snivel and sopp. You fetch up on your feet or I'll slap you straight across the bridge of your nose!"

Emily rose in sobbing haste. She stood like a cornered animal, trying to decide which direction to bolt in.

"Where's your car, Emily?"

"Out—in—front, Ma'am."

"Good." Aunt Tildy hustled her out the front door. "Now—" Her sharp stare poked both directions of the street. "Which way is it to the mortuary?"

Emily had to hold onto the rail of the steps fumbling down. "What are you going to do, Aunt Tildy?"

"Do?" cried Tildy, tottering after her, jowls shaking in a thin, pale fury. "Why, get my body back, of course! *Get my body back! Go on!*"

THE car roared. Emily clenched to the steering-wheel, staring straight ahead at the curving rain-wetted streets. Aunt Tildy shook her parasol.

"Hurry, child, hurry. Hurry before they squirt juices into my body and dices and cubes in the way them persnickety morticians have a habit of doing. They cuts and sews it so it ain't no good to no one!"

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, leave me go, don't make me drive. It won't do no good, no good at all," sighed the girl.

"Humph!" was all the old woman would say. "Humph!"

Emily pulled into the curb and cut the motor.

"Here," she said, wearily. "Here we are, Auntie." She collapsed over the wheel, but Aunt Tildy was already skedaddled from the open door and trotting with mincing skirt up the concrete drive and around in back to where the shining black hearse was unloading a wicker basket.

Aunt Tildy thrust to the attack, immediately.

"Young man," she directed her shout at one of the four men unloading the basket, "young man, put down that basket. Put it right down!"

The four men carrying the basket paid little attention.

One of them said, "Step aside, lady. We're doing our job. Let us do it, please."

"But that's my body you got tucked in there!" declared Auntie, brandishing her parasol.

"That I wouldn't know anything about," said a third man. "Please don't block traffic, Madame. This thing is heavy."

That probed a painful wound in Aunt Tildy's pride.

"Sir," she cried. "I'll have you know I only weigh one hundred and ten pounds!"

He looked at her with funny eyes. "I'm not interested in your hip measurements, lady. I just wanna go home and eat dinner. My wife'll kill me if I'm late."

The four of them forged ahead, Aunt Tildy in hot pursuit through a large door into a hall, down the hall and into a preparations room.

A man in a clean white smock stood awaiting its arrival with a rather pleased smile on his long, eager-looking face. Aunt Tildy didn't care for the avidity of that face, or the personality of the entire man himself. The basket was deposited and the four men retreated.

The man in the white smock, evidently a mortician, glanced at Auntie and said:

"Madame, this is no fit place for a gentlewoman."

"Well," said Auntie, gratified, "I'm glad you feel that way. Them is my sentiments, but I can't seem to convince those other men. That's exactly what I tried to tell that dark-clothed young man."

The mortician puzzled. "What dark-clothed young man is that?"

The one who came puddling around my house, that's who."

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"We have no one of that description working for us—"

"Well," Auntie continued, "as you just so intelligently said, this is no place for a gentle lady like me. And I don't want me here. I want me home, I want me cooking turkey for Sunday visitors, it's almost Easter time. I got people to worry about. Emily to feed, all them sweaters to finish knitting—"

The mortician was patient but beginning to get perturbed. "I'm sure you're quite philosophical and philanthropical, Madame, but I have no time. A body has just arrived." This last, he said with evident relish, and a glance at his assorted scalpels and instruments.

Aunt Tildy bristled. "If you lays so much as a cuticle on that body, I'll beat you," she assured him. Again, the parasol.

He brushed her aside like a little old moth.

"Oh, Heimings," he called gently to one of the men. "Escort this little lady outside, please."

Aunt Tildy glared at the fellow.

"Show me your backside, going the other way!"

The assistant came and held onto Aunt Tildy's wrists. "This way, please."

TILDY extricated hersif easily. It wasn't hard with the way her flesh sort of—slipped. It even amazed Tildy. Such an unexpected talent to develop at this late stage. "There," said Auntie, much pleased at her ability. "See? You can't budge me. I want my body back!"

The mortician opened the wicker basket casually, then in a recurrent series of double-takes realized that the body was—it seemed—maybe—yes—no—well, uh—it couldn't be but— "Ah," he exhaled suddenly. He turned. His eyes were wide.

"Madame," he said, cautiously. "Eh—this lady in here. Eh—is she—relative of yours?"

"A very dear relative. Be careful of her."

"A twin sister, perhaps." He grasped at a straw of dwindling logic, hopefully.

"No, you fool. Me, do you hear? Me!"

The mortician considered the proposition. He shook his head to clear the fog. "No," he decided. "Things like this don't happen." He busied himself about the room, make preparations. "Take her away, William. Get the other men and take her away. I can't work with a crank around."

When the four men assembled and converged upon her, Aunt Tildy was a fortress in lavendered lace. Arms crossed in muscular defiance she said, "I won't budge." She continued to repeat that phrase as she was evicted in consecutive moves, like a pawn on a chessboard, from preparation room to resting room to hall, to waiting chamber, to funeral parlor, where she made her last stand by sitting herself down on a chair in the very center of the funeral vestibule. There were pews going back into gray silence, and a smell of flowers.

"You can't sit there, lady," said one of the men. "That's where the body rests for the service tomorrow."

"I'm sitting right plumb here until I get what I want. Sit right here on this spot," was Auntie's instant retort.

THEY tried to move her. She just sat there, pale fingers fussing with her fussy lace at her throat, jaw set, one high shining shoe tapping impatiently. If they got near enough she quickly whopped them a whop with her parasol. And when they touched her she sort of—slipped—away.

Mr. Carrington, the Mortuary President, heard the disturbance from his office in back and came toddling in to see what the commotion was about. He scurried down the aisle. "Here, here," he whispered, finger to mouth, "Show more respect. What is this? Oh. Madame, may I help you?"

She looked him up and down. "You may."

"And how may I be of service, please?"

"Go in that room over there," directed Aunt Tildy.

"Yes?"

"And tell that eager young investigator to quit fiddling with my body. I'm a maiden lady, and my moles, birthmarks, scars and other bric-a-brac, including the turn of my ankle, are my own secrets. I don't want him prying around, cutting it or hurting it in any way."

This was a trifle vague to Mr. Carrington, who had not as yet had an opportunity to correlate bodies. "I don't—see," he said, in vague helplessness.

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"He's got me in there on his table like a turkey ready to be drawn and stuffed—"

Mr. Carrington hustled off to verify this claim. After fifteen minutes of waiting silence and horrified arguing, comparing of notes with the mortician behind the closed door, Mr. Carrington returned, pale and shaking, to confront Auntie.

"Well?" said Auntie.

"Uh—that is. Most irregular. You can't—sit—there."

"Can't I?"

Carrington dropped his glasses, picked them up, fumbled them on his nose and said, "You are making it difficult for us."

"I? I!" raged Auntie. "Saint Vitus in the morning! Now, looky here, Mister Blood and Bones or whatever, you tell that—"

"But he's already extracting the blood from the body."

"What!" Auntie swayed and coughed. It was like a kick in the face with an iron boot. "What'd you say?"

"Yes, yes, oh, I assure you, yes. So you just go away, there's nothing to be done. The blood is running from the body and it'll soon be all filled with nice fresh A-1 formaldehyde." He laughed nervously. "Our mortician is also performing a brief autopsy to determine the cause of death."

Auntie was on her feet, burning. "Cutting me, is he?"

"Y-yes."

"He can't do that. Only coroners are allowed to do that."

"Well, we sometimes allow a little—"

"Young man!"

"Yes'm?"

"You are going to march plumb straight into that room now and you are going to tell that Cutemup to pump all that nice New England blue blood right back into that fine-skinned old body, and if he's taken anything out of that body, for him to attach it back in so it'll function proper, and then you'll turn that body, fresh as paint back into my keeping. You hear, you HEAR!"

"There's nothing I can do. Nothing."

"Awright then, snigger-britches. Tell you WHAT. I'm setting here on this spot for the next two hundred years. You hear? And every time anyone comes in I'll spit ectoplasm right square in their left nostril!"

Carrington fumbled that thought around in the weakening interior of his mind and emitted a squeak. "Oh, no. No. You'll dislocate our business. Heavens. Millions of dollars will be lost. You wouldn't do that?"

Auntie smiled pleasantly. "*Wouldn't* I?"

Carrington ran up the dark aisle and in the distance one could hear him frantically fingering a dial-phone and then talking to a series of important people. It took him half an hour and then huge cars began roaring up in front of the mortuary and the brothers Harrington arrived to bolster their hysterical president.

All six of them came down the aisle like a delegation of diplomats. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Auntie told them with a few well-chosen cuss words.

They held a conference, meanwhile notifying the mortician to discontinue his home-work until such time as an amenable agreement had been reached. The mortician came out of his chamber and stood smiling quietly and smoking a cigar.

Auntie looked at the cigar.

"Where did you put the ashes?" she cried, horrified.

The mortician only smiled imperturbably and puffed.

The committee finally decided. Harrington Number One represented the others.

"Madame, we need this vestibule to carry on our business. We need it badly. Now, in all fairness, you wouldn't throw us out on the street to continue our services, would you?"

AUNTIE looked the vultures over. "Oh, I wouldn't mind. No, I wouldn't mind at all."

Harrington wiped sweat from his cheeks. "Our proposition is this. You can have your body back."

"Ha!" shouted Auntie. Then, with caution: "Intact?"

"Intact."

"Without formaldehyde?"

"Without formaldehyde!"

"With blood in it?"

"Blood. Yes, yes, oh, my God, yes, if only you'll take it and go."

Auntie nodded a prim head. "Fair enough. Fix it up, and it's a deal!"

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Harrington glared at the mortician. "Well, don't stand there! Fix it up!"

"And be careful with that cigar butt," added Auntie.

"EASY, EASY," said Aunt Tildy. "Put the wicker basket down on the floor where I can step in it easy."

They placed the wicker on the floor. She didn't look at the body much. Her only comment was, "Natural looking." Then she let herself fall backward into the wicker.

There was a sudden biting sensation of arctic coldness, a great twisting nausea and a spinning. It was like two drops of matter coalescing. Water trying to seep into concrete. So slow to do. So hard. Like a butterfly trying to fight back into its discarded husk of chrysalis.

All the faces watched Aunt Tildy in her struggles. Mr. Harrington was evidently concerned. He kept wringing his fingers apprehensively and trying to help with gestures. The mortician was frankly skeptical and in grim humor. The others just stared.

Seeping into cold granite stone. Seeping into a frozen and ancient statue. Fighting all the way.

"Come alive, damn ye!" shouted Aunt Tildy to herself. "Raise up a bit."

The body half rose, fumbling inside the dry wicker.

"Get to your legs, woman!"

The body rose further, blindly groping.

"See!" shouted Aunt Tildy.

Light entered the webbed blind eyes.

"Feel!" urged Aunt Tildy.

The body felt the warmth of the room, the sudden presence of the preparations table against which to lean, panting.

"Move!"

The body took a creakingly unsteady step.

"Hear!" she shouted.

All the noises of the place came into the dulled ears. Opening up to let them in. The harsh, expectant breathing of the mortician and the whimpering Mr. Harrington.

"Walk!" she cried.

The body walked.

"Think!" Auntie said.

The old brain thought.

"Now—speak!" she ordered.

The body spoke, bowing to the mortician's crew.

"Much obliged. Thank you."

"Now," said Aunt Tildy, finally. "Cry!"

And she began to cry tears of utter happiness.

AND now, any afternoon, about four, if you want to visit Aunt Tildy, you just walk around to her antique shop and rap on the door. There's a big black funeral wreath on the door. But don't mind that. Aunt Tildy left it there. She has *some* sense of humor.

You rap on the door. It's double-barred and triple-locked, and when you rap her voice shrills out at you:

"Is that the man in black?"

And you laugh and say no, no, it's only me, Aunt Tildy.

And she laughs and says, "Come in quick!" and she whips the door open and slams it shut back of you so no man in black can ever slip in behind you. Then she escorts you in and pours you your cup of coffee and shows you her latest knitted sweater for the boys overseas. She's not as fast as she used to be, and can't see as good, but she gets along.

"And, if you're especially good," Aunt Tildy declares, setting her coffee-cup to one side, "I'll give you a little treat."

"What's that?" visitors will ask.

"This," says Auntie, pleased with her little uniqueness, her little joke.

Then with modest moves of her fingers she will unfasten the white lace at her neck and chest and for a brief moment show what lies beneath.

The long blue scar where the autopsy was neatly sewn together.

"Not bad sewing for a *man*," she allows. "Oh, some more coffee? *There*."

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# *The* Man Who Wouldn't Hang

*The official State executioner had one story to tell he was not likely ever to forget. . . .*

*By* ***STANTON A. COBLENTZ***

HE WAS a burly man with a beaked nose, and hard, cold, glittering eyes. For thirty years he had been the official State executioner; and, consequently, he had interesting if grisly stories to tell. There is one of his yarns that I am not likely soon to forget.

"Did anybody ever get away from you?" one of us put the inevitable question. And Carrigan flung himself far back in his chair, gave his mat of grizzled hair a violent toss, and stroked his bony projecting chin.

"Well, nobody ever broke out of the death-cell, if that's what you mean," he answered, slowly. "But one fellow did get away, just the same."

All of us leaned forward eagerly.

"Yes, sirree, one fellow got away, but you wouldn't believe me if I told you

**Heading by A. R. TILBURNE**



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about it. Hardly believe it myself, when I come to think of it. It was the doggonest case you ever heard of."

He paused long enough to light a cigarette; then resumed.

"Twenty-five years ago it all happened, but I remember the poor devil just as plain as if I met him yesterday. A little sawed-off guy, with a round head and funny popping big black eyes. There was an old scar that ran down from his left temple to just over his right eye. It didn't make him look what you'd call pretty. Perkins or Parkins or something like that was his name, but we all called him Scar-Face. Just a common no-good; tried to hold up a bank with three other thugs, and a clerk got killed. Always swore he didn't fire the shot, but what the hell's the difference? Law says he's guilty whether he fired or not, don't it? Jury wasn't out one hour!"

"So he was sentenced to be hanged?"

"Yes, sirree, hanged by the neck till he died. I didn't waste any sympathy on such bums, believe me. Just the same, I had to admire the fellow's spunk, when the time came round. Was game as a fighting cock. Smiled and laughed; you'd of thought he was going to a party. Why, he turned out to be such a good sport I was sort of sorry when the morning came for springing the trap."

"Maybe he expected a pardon from the Governor?" I suggested.

Carrigan flicked out the ashes from his cigarette with a contemptuous toss of one hand.

"Pardon? Like hell! Who was Scar-Face, anyway? Didn't have the influence of a gutter-rat! No, sirree, old Governor Horton wasn't the man to be wasting ink on such curs. The poor brute knew damned well he wouldn't get a pardon!"

"Then some confederate—"

"A whale of a lot any confederate could do! I tell you, there wasn't none of us would have given a burnt-out cigar butt for his chances. And there he was, joking up to the last minute; eating a hearty breakfast, and all. Usually they begin to look a little downhearted about this time; lots of 'em get morose. But not Scar-Face. You'd of thought he was being honored, the way he smiled when we led him off to the execution chamber. 'What's the matter with the guy? Is he dippy?' I wondered. . . . Made a little speech when they asked if he had any last word; cracked a lot of jokes, and ended with, 'Well, boys, see you all in Kingdom Come!' Speaking of coolness—he had a cucumber backed plumb off the map!"

WE ALL sat about, voiceless; while Carrigan, as if re-living the scene, took out his handkerchief and mopped uneasily at his bullet brow.

"Actually helped us blindfold him, would you believe it? The last I saw of those funny popping black eyes of his, they seemed to be sparkling—yes, by God! Sparkling just as if he was enjoying a joke on us! Don't that just beat hell? Well, I never mentioned it to anybody before, but a sort of spooky feeling came over me, like something was holding back my hands and didn't want me to execute that fellow. I think the reporters and spectators felt it, too; it was like a wave that went through them, and they all trembled together. Sounds daffy, don't it? But wait till you hear what happened!"

"Well, what did happen?"

"Nothing you'd of looked for. Acting sort of against my will, I got everything ready. The prisoner climbed the gallows, and was all strapped up in the proper place. All I had to do was pull the lever, and the trap would give way, and he'd fall and break his blasted neck. Guess I'd done it fifty times before if I'd done it once, so there wasn't any reason to hold back, was there?"

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"None that I can see."

"None that anybody could see. Just the same, I did hold back. Must of been all of ten minutes. Made all sorts of fishy excuses. Just couldn't get myself to pull that blamed lever. It was like something was dragging back my arms. I must of been about paralyzed till I heard the prisoner himself talking—or, at least, I thought it was him. 'What the hell you waiting for?' But he didn't sound angry or impatient—not the least. Swear to God, it was just like the guy was daring me!"

"So then you opened the trap?"

"Yes, so then I opened the trap."

Carrigan's fingers seemed to be quivering, as he took out and lit another cigarette.

"By Christ! I thought that was the end. By all the rules of the game, Scar-Face should of been dead. But he wasn't."

"You mean," one of us gasped, "when the trap fell, it didn't kill him?"

"No," returned Carrigan, slowly and solemnly, "I mean the trap didn't fall."

The fire by this time had burnt low, and our host had risen to stir the embers and add a log. It was a minute before the narrator could resume.

"No, by heaven!" he testified. "The trap didn't fall! It was the first time that ever happened, and we couldn't figure out what was wrong. I pulled the lever again and again—no result! So we brought Scar-Face down from the gallows, and then tried the trap without him. I'm a blinking four-eyed jackass if it didn't work perfectly!"

"Whatever was wrong must have fixed itself automatically," I suggested.

"That's just what we thought. Still, we went over the whole shooting match with a fine comb before trying it again, with the prisoner. There wasn't so much as a screw out of joint. No reason under the sun why it wouldn't work. But all the time we were examining it, we could hear Scar-Face complaining—no, not complaining, kidding the dickens out of us. 'Why don't you fellows get a move on? . . . What you keeping me waiting for? . . . I got an important appointment, and you're making me late!'

"Well, finally we made up our minds the trap had to work this time. Just simply had to. So we hauled Scar-Face upstairs again, and got ready to finish him off. I was getting sort of riled at him by now, for not hanging decent and proper. But when I pulled that lever again—you can blast me to perdition if I lie—nothing happened. Nothing at all! That trap still wouldn't open!"

"Must have been bewitched," someone threw out, facetiously.

"You're damned right! Bewitched is the word. That's just how it looked to us. Well, we went over the whole rotten contraption again, so carefully you couldn't miss a bolt. Seemed in A One order. Every time we let down the trap with nobody in it, it worked like a charm. Tell you what I did then. Had myself tied by ropes around the middle, and my assistant pulled the lever, letting me down through the trap. Of course, it didn't hurt me much except for the jerk."

"But did it work?"

"Work? You bet it did! If it ud had me round the neck, you wouldn't see me here today, boys! There wasn't anything wrong with that trap, the way it let me down! But what do you think happened next time we tried it on Scar-Face?"

We remained silent.

"Well, the pesky thing just gave a sort of rattling, like it didn't know how to make up its mind, and stayed shut. I tell you, boys, we were plumb tuckered out by then. Just had to give up. So we hauled Scar-Face back to the death-cell, and sent word to the Governor we couldn't hang him."

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"How did the Governor take it?"

"How do you think he took it? Set up a hell of a row. Threatened to fire me. But I had plenty of witnesses, so he finally set a new execution date, and came down himself, with three members of the State prison board, to see matters done right and proper. We had a new gallows all rigged up, too, guaranteed fool-proof. But think that made any difference?"

"Should have," I ventured.

"Then you've got another guess coming. Why, I never saw four more surprised looking fellows in my life than Governor Horton and the prison directors. We tried the trap first, of course, and it was beautiful to see the way it worked. Then we put Scar-Face on. He seemed to think it was a great joke; bowed to the Governor before we tied him up, and said, 'I don't mind so much getting hanged, friends, now that it's coming to be a habit.' But we bundled him up good and fast, and I didn't waste much time about pulling that lever, hoping it'd be the end of Scar-Face and all out trouble. But somehow I knew it wouldn't be."

"So he still didn't hang?"

CARRIGAN turned and spat disgustedly into the fire, which was blazing with uncanny fitfulness.

"No, curse him! Right there before the Governor, he wouldn't hang. That trap was balkier than an army mule. The Governor, I tell you, went pretty near white when he watched me trying time and again. They say he had a superstitious vein in him, old Governor Horton. After a while he got up and said, 'Twaint no more use trying, Mr. Carrigan. I commute his sentence to life imprisonment.' And then he got out so fast you'd of thought somebody was chasing him."

The ex-hangman shifted his long bulky legs, lit another cigarette, and went on.

"So that's the only man I ever knew that cheated the gallows. But there's a sequel to the story. Five or six years later a member of his old gang died, and swore on his death-bed Scar-Face didn't have anything to do with that bank killing—wasn't even around when it happened. There was a new Governor then, and after looking into the facts he issued a pardon. So far as I can make out, Scar-Face has led a decent life ever since."

We all shifted uneasily in our seats, glancing by turns at the eerily flickering fire and at the hard, grizzled face of the narrator.

I do not know which of us it was that asked:

"Have you any theory, Mr. Carrigan, as to why Scar-Face wouldn't hang?"

A slightly furtive, almost a frightened look came into the executioner's eyes. He shuddered; and then hesitantly, in slow, grave tones, replied:

"Well, yes, folks, I have got a theory. Don't know as you'll follow me—matter of fact, I've never let on to a soul. Still, what I saw, the last time I put Scar-Face on the gallows—guess it was what old Horton saw, too, before he commuted the sentence."

"What did you see?"

Carrigan drew a long breath, almost like a sigh.

"Nothing you could describe very well. At first it was like a pale, shining mist. But after a while it seemed—swear to God, boys, I wasn't dreaming—seemed that mist took form. The shape was like two hands. At one end they reached to a big shadowy something that I couldn't quite make out. But, at the other end—I tell you the hair on my head prickled when I saw it—the fingers were tugging at the trap, holding it shut!"

The beads of perspiration that came out on Carrigan's brow, and the glaring, haunted look in his eyes, testified that he was re-living a terrible experience.

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# Lady Macbeth of Pimley Square

*By AUGUST DERLETH*

MRS. ABERNETHY JENKS was one of those vain, silly women who fancy themselves great (if thwarted) actresses, and when the Pimley Square Community Players, of which she was a member, presented *Macbeth* with herself in the role of Macbeth's lady, she achieved such a minor success that it went to her head in a most distressing fashion. In short, she began to develop genuine illusions about herself and her role, and these grew with such persistence that her husband, after due consultation with his older brother, Repley, who lived with them in the house in Pimley Square, felt called upon to seek the services of a psychiatrist.

So Dr. Wightman was sent for.

Dr. Wightman was a man of some little reputation, achieved largely by shrewd guessing and only incidentally by genuine knowledge. That is not to say that he was not without sense; indeed, he was not. He had grown wealthy literally on his wits, and, after listening to Abernethy Jenks for half

*How do you solve murder committed by a person who was manifestly somewhere else?*

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV



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an hour, it was perfectly clear to him that he was dealing with a case of dual personality undoubtedly rising out of a long-standing frustration which only the utmost patience would cure. Dr. Wightman, of course, reassured Mr. Jenks, collected a retainer, and set out for the house with him to pay his respects to his patient.

Mrs. Jenks was a slender, hatchet-faced woman, with intense dark eyes and unruly dark hair; she was not at all bad-looking, with the kind of looks which at first do not particularly attract men, but end up almost impossible to be forgotten by men. She was not a very dominant personality, but seemed ultra-refined, quite a little of this being the veneer of conventionality adopted to conceal her natural shortcomings, and was, withal, pleasant enough to deal with. Moreover, she seemed to be normal, save for her unusual custom of occasionally quoting Lady Macbeth's lines from the play, and Dr. Wightman was quite favorably impressed. He made a mental estimate of how much it would take to cure the lady—that is, in the matter of his fee, purely—and had some conversation with her.

This was in keeping with her role. He asked her point-blank whether she considered herself ideal for the role of Lady Macbeth.

"Indeed, I do," she responded, thinking he had something to do with the theatre, since he had not been introduced as a psychiatrist.

He encouraged her to talk about herself.

It appeared that not only was she convinced she had a calling for the stage and particularly the role of Lady Macbeth, but she had the persistent illusion that she was two people—herself, and the character she had so successfully played.

"In what way, two people?" he asked.

"Well, sometimes I am convinced that she is with me, too. A part of me. As if my astral self had become Lady Macbeth. Do you understand?"

Dr. Wightman certainly did not understand, but fortunately he had his own way of pigeon-holing information, important or not, and when he saw Abernethy Jenks he imparted to him his grave conclusion that Mrs. Jenks was schizophrenic. This was a little beyond Jenks, so he explained that he meant that Mrs. Jenks had a split personality. He shook his head seriously and implied that it would take time and money to cure the condition. The symptoms were all too common—fits of depression—

"But she seems if anything exhilarated," protested Jenks.

"Yes, the other extreme," agreed Wightman suavely.

DR. WIGHTMAN called several times to see Mrs. Jenks, and, because he listened attentively, he began to learn a good deal about her case. Correctly interpreting what he heard, however, was another matter. It seemed that Mrs. Jenks believed every time she lay down to rest or sleep, a "part of" herself slipped out of her and went prowling around in the guise and semblance of Lady Macbeth. Privately, Dr. Wightman considered this a supremely ridiculous delusion, but he was much too wise to say as much. He asked where she went. Oh, she was about setting the stage, replied Mrs. Jenks naively.

It did not occur to Dr. Wightman to inquire for what she was setting the stage. He assumed her parlance was that of the theatre, and envisioned somebody shifting wings and scenery. Nevertheless, Dr. Wightman was sufficiently enlightened to root around in the background a little, and thus he happened upon the fact that the Jenks household represented a Macbeth pattern in miniature. That is, Repley Jenks, the older brother, was absolute master of his business, and Abernethy was but the junior partner, whose rise to control was resolutely thwarted by Repley as a matter of self-preservation. And Mrs. Jenks, naturally, chafed at the frustration imposed upon her Abernethy, though Abernethy himself was far from minding, since the assumption of major responsibilities by Repley left him free. Having got so far in his casual investigation, it was a pity Dr. Wightman did not see fit to go just a little farther. But he did not.

He did, however, suggest to Abernethy Jenks that he sponsor another presentation of *Macbeth,* and arrange for Mrs. Jenks to get scathing reviews. This, he thought, would rock her back on her heels and give her a different perspective on the stage in her life. Abernethy was enthusiastic, and,

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after the usual consultation with Repley, he agreed to do just what the doctor had suggested. The arrangements were made, Mrs. Jenks was delighted at the opportunity to do herself proud once more, and everything went off on schedule—but not quite as it had been planned.

For Mrs. Jenks was a natural. She was so good in her role that all the critics who had been paid to disparage her acting went to town and gave her rave notices, which, for a community playhouse, was virtually unbelievable. Yet there it was. Mrs. Jenks, said the sum total of the accounts, was an actress who merited a far wider stage—indeed, the widest.

Mr. Jenks was vexed.

Mrs. Jenks was in seventh heaven.

Mr. Repley Jenks observed very practically that the whole affair seemed only to have increased the dangers of Mrs. Jenks' condition.

Even Dr. Wightman was somewhat dismayed, but with the resilience of people who believe in themselves very much, he bounded back in half a week's time with other ideas. He came to the house one evening to expound them, and sat talking them over with the Jenks brothers in the living room. They were not much impressed. They talked back and forth, over and across, but could not seemingly reach much agreement. Mrs. Jenks was, naturally, not present; she was upstairs lying down.

However, in the middle of their conversation, when Repley had gone into the kitchen to mix a few drinks, Mrs. Jenks came gliding down the stairs, smiled obliquely at them, and went into that part of the house where her brother-in-law was clinking ice and glasses. In a little while she came out again, paused briefly, and said, "Was the hope drunk, wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since, and wakes it now, to look so green and pale at what it did so freely?" and returned up the stairs.

"That's what I mean," said Abernethy. "The end of the first act."

"Yes, I see," said Dr. Wightman gravely, looking after her with puzzled eyes and pursed lips.

"By George! I thought I locked her door from the outside!" exclaimed Abernethy, looking a little wildly at Dr. Wightman. "I did, too!" Saying which, he produced the key from his pocket.

The two men went quickly up the stairs to try Mrs. Jenks' door. It was locked. Mr. Jenks inserted the key, turned the knob, and quietly entered the room. Mrs. Jenks was sound asleep, just as he had left her.

"How the devil did she do that?" he demanded of Wightman on the stairs.

"She managed somehow," said the doctor pompously. "There is always an explanation for these things."

AT THAT propitious moment, they were both startled by a loud moan from the kitchen, and went thither without delay. There they found Repley dragging himself to his feet from the floor where he had been lying; it took them a moment to discover that the spot on his shoulder was not water, but blood. Repley had been stabbed—fortunately, not fatally—but he was in no condition to say what had happened. He had been busy mixing the drinks, he had thought someone was in the room with him, he had seen no one, but he had been stabbed just the same.

"It was Mrs. Jenks," said Dr. Wightman.

"The devil it was!" said Repley, now relaxing despite the pain in his shoulder while waiting for a certified M. D. to make his appearance.

Dr. Wightman was seriously disturbed, as well he might be. Mrs. Jenks was clearly becoming a menace, but until he could explain how she could have got out of that room when her husband had, it appeared, the only key to its door, he could take no steps to have her certified. Abernethy and Repley were both perplexed and troubled, and looked to Dr. Wightman to solve the mystery. But the mysteries of mind were one aspect of detection, and those of material things were another, not in Dr. Wightman's field. He could deal very well with the unknown, since all he needed was an air of authoritativeness and some reason, which would serve very well to confound the layman, whose knowledge of the unknown was no less profound than Dr. Wightman's, save that he knew it not.

Meanwhile, the story of Mrs. Jenks' curious malady got around.

One afternoon Dr. Wightman was called

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upon by a rather shabby individual who introduced himself despite the psychiatrist's cold superiority as a "doctor of spiritualism." Dr. Wightman could be offensive, indeed, and he had no use whatsoever for believers in spiritualism and the like. Nevertheless, Mr. Abrams, for such was his name, was nothing daunted by Dr. Wightman's scorn, so poorly concealed that it might have been embarrassing to anyone less thick-skinned than the spiritualist.

He informed the psychiatrist that he was by way of being a "student of occult matters," that the story of Mrs. Jenks had reached his ears, and that her case was as plain as a pikestaff, and he could not understand why Dr. Wightman had not yet ordered the woman confined in some safe place—though he openly doubted that such confinement would help now that the matter had gone this far.

"I am sorry to disagree with you," said Wightman stiffly, "but Mrs. Jenks' is a most complicated case, not at all plain."

"Oh, no," said Abrams congenially, as if to a fellow-student. "It's plain that her astral self is completely identified with Lady Macbeth, and you might look for the Macbeth pattern to work itself out in some form. Let me see—it was Dunean who stood in Macbeth's way, didn't he? And Lady Macbeth arranged to have him removed, urging her husband to murder. Well, now, obviously Mrs. Jenks' husband is not the type to respond to such treatment; so she will have to do it herself. As I understand it, Repley Jenks stands in the way of Abernethy Jenks' control of their business. An attack was made on Repley—I know they tried to keep it quiet, but I learned of it—and there, I postulate, is the initial step."

"That attack has not been explained, Mr. Abrams," said Wightman. "Mrs. Jenks was locked in her room at the time."

"Oh, yes—her *physical* self. But not her astral self."

"What do you mean by 'astral,' Mr. Abrams?"

"Why, her essential life stuff, Dr. Wightman. I don't know that it could be put any more clear than that. It can arise and leave her body in sleep, or in coma, or in any kind of similar state."

Dr. Wightman's opinion of Abrams was censorable, and he lost no time in seeing him out. The psychiatrist thought that he was being very wise in keeping the story of Abrams' visit strictly to himself; so he imparted nothing of it to the brothers Jenks, who were in any case busy with Repley's recovery and their joint concern about the peculiarities of Mrs. Abernethy Jenks.

MR. ABRAMS, however, was annoyingly persistent. He wrote Dr. Wightman a nasty little note saying that unless the proper steps were taken at once, he was likely to be an unwitting aid to murder, though he admitted that locked doors were no barrier to astrals, which had no substance. Wightman ignored him, which was difficult to do, in view of his insolence.

Mrs. Jenks in the course of the next few days, had increasingly lucid periods, and her solicitude for her brother-in-law was touching. She could not keep him comfortable enough, it seemed, and this care and attention, so alien to the Mrs. Jenks, Repley had always known, was both surprising and pleasurable. By this time, too, he had come to look upon Dr. Wightman as an intimate friend of her husband's, and one evening she invited him over to dinner. It was the first evening Repley was considered well enough to come to the table for an hour or so, after which it was deemed advisable that he return to his own room and relax once more.

Mrs. Jenks was in good spirits, and, once she escaped that strange phobia, she was vivacious and cheerful, determined to make her guests at dinner feel at their best. She had hired a cook for the occasion, and a maid, too, so that the dinner was presented with taste. She had made up the menu herself, and had given some direction to the preparation of the food. Indeed, she put herself out to such a degree to be agreeable that Dr. Wightman secretly complimented himself on the talks he had had with her and, once she was out of the room, pointedly referred to his "treatment," as having helped Mrs. Jenks to a greater stability, which was manifest to all of them.

Nevertheless, there were certain annoying little manifestations.

(*Continued on page 91*)

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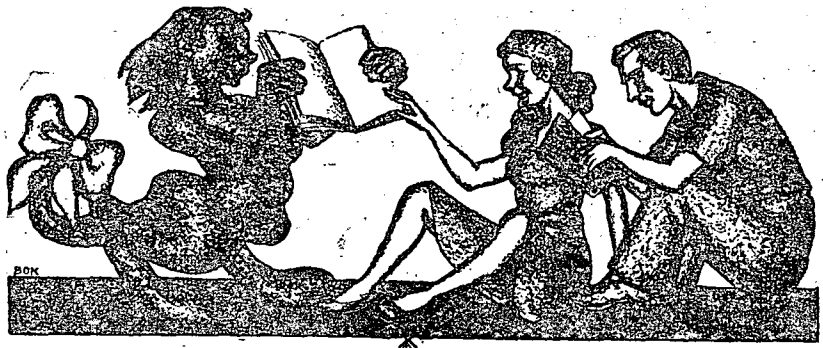
# The Shape of Thrills to Come




## THE SHADOW FOLK

**By Edmond Hamilton**

THE Others had crowded them into this last refuge, and now even this was being taken away. Every summer, more of the Others came into these high, remote peaks until in all the world there seemed no place for the Shadow Folk!

## The Devil's Ticket

a macabre tale of willful doom

**By ROBERT BLOCH**

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# Lady Macbeth of Pimley Square

(*Continued from page* 89)

When Repley hesitated to help himself to some broccoli, for instance, Mrs. Jenks hastened to assure him that he might do so in safety, "it hath no poison in't." She was observed at this moment to gaze at him with a strange glittering in her eyes. Dr. Wightman thought it a little unnerving, but later contented himself with the reflection that the whole thing was a misconstruction of a simple jest.

When Abernethy had occasion to hand his brother a carving knife, Mrs. Jenks observed gravely, shaking her head, "My hands are of your colour, but I shame to wear a heart so white.

This, of course, was pure *Macbeth*.

In a moment, however, Mrs. Jenks was conversing with the utmost naturalness, and the incident was overlooked as but another brief halt on the way to her ultimate recovery. The dinner proceeded smoothly; there was considerable talk about the progress of the war and the prospects of peace, and by and by the dinner was over, Repley Jenks retired to his room, and presently Mrs. Jenks, too, made her excuses, saying she must rest, and away she went to do so.

Thereupon Abernethy, as he had done for the past fortnight, took himself off up the stairs and locked his wife in her room. Then he rejoined Dr. Wightman, who began at once to make some rather vague inquiries into the business in which Repley and Abernethy were engaged, thus discovering that if anything happened to Repley, Abernethy would indeed come into a commanding position, though he had no great inclination toward it, and was for his part quite content.

"It's only that Mrs. Jenks keeps after me," he admitted.

"Has she always done so?"

"For many years. She has always seemed discontented that I should not stir myself and better my position. However, I'm quite content with my position; I am by nature a simple man, and being in a subordinate position enables me to spend my leisure as I see fit—and I should not see fit to worry about the business. Better for Repley to do that; he's a good hand at it."

It annoyed Dr. Wightman a little that the psychic, Abrams, had been able to get a clearer picture of the Jenks household than he had, but then, Abrams had had the overall view, and he had been concerned primarily with Mrs. Jenks' strange mania. Astral self, nonsense! The woman was a plain psychotic.

THEY had talked for about an hour, when they were disturbed by what sounded like a struggle in Repley Jenks' room. There was a sudden eruption of sound, a muffled cry, and then a long, shuddering moan, equally muffled.

"Good God!" exclaimed Abernethy, "What was that?"

Dr. Wightman, fully as startled as his host, was unable to say.

Both men had come instinctively to their feet, and were standing in that brief indecision preceding action—of what kind, neither had yet decided—when Mrs. Jenks appeared at the head of the stairs, looking down at them. She stood there but for a moment; then she began to descend the stairs, ignoring her husband's wild question; she came straight down at them, and was observed to be rubbing her hands together as if she were washing them.

At Abernethy's repetition of his question about what had happened, she said without glancing in his direction, "What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

Then she went on past the two men toward the door opening to the outside.

Abernethy glanced fearfully at Dr. Wightman, who returned his host's glance with equal fear. As if the sudden thought which had entered their minds at that moment were not enough, they had the folly to turn once more toward Mrs. Abernethy Jenks, who was at that moment engaged in a performance the like of which neither of the gentlemen in her audience had ever before seen or were ever likely to see again.

She was in the act of passing *through the door*.

Abernethy blinked and looked again, but

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she was gone. He gazed at Dr. Wightman.

"Hallucination," murmured the psychiatrist thickly.

It was Jenks who led the way up to Repley's room. They found the older man as dead as a mackerel; he had been stabbed not once, but several times, and he lay in a blood-soaked bed. Apparently a pillow had been held over his head while the deed was done. Without pausing to call the doctor, Abernethy went to his wife's room.

It was still locked; he had to use his key. Entering, they found Mrs. Abernethy Jenks in what was either a deep coma or a cataleptic trance, for she was immovable in her bed, and quite incapable of being aroused.

It was a very nasty business.

Quite unknown to either Abernethy Jenks or Dr. Wightman, a young girl across the city, who had lain down to rest before going on to play the role of Lady Macbeth in her school's performance of *Macbeth*, woke up feeling mighty strange indeed, "like another person," as she subsequently said, and went out upon the stage to play her role with such superb art that she brought down the house. Unfortunately, immediately after the play she was seized with such a drowsiness that she had to lie down again, and from a short, deep sleep, woke up with no knowledge whatever about her perfromance.

Coincident with her waking—while the police were all over the Jenks' house, badgering poor Abernethy and putting Dr. Wightman through such paces that he began to have serious doubts about resuming his practise—of—psychiatry—Mrs. Abernethy Jenks came out of her coma, out of her room, and, frightened by the police, tripped and fell down the stairs, breaking her neck.

It was the end of a great, if little appreciated, career.

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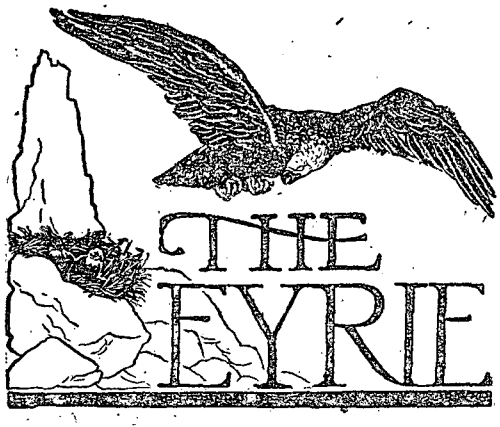


### Man with a Room

A NEWCOMER to our pages, Crawford Sullivan, who rents out "The Spare Room" in this issue, tells us how he came about doing this.

Confesses Mr. Sullivan:

I've been in the writing game for quite a while, but this is the first attempt I've ever made at a story of this type. Perhaps it's because I had an inspiration. Now, if most writers sat around and waited for a genuine inspiration, they'd probably starve before the year was out. As a matter of fact, a great many do. The true inspiration that smites you like a bolt from the blue does its smiting all too seldom.

The inspiration for "The Spare Room" happened to be a chap who, perhaps like many readers of WEIRD TALES, sought an escape from this world of blow torches and riveting machines by deliberately giving himself the creeps. After reading everything ghostly and ghastly he could lay hands on, after witnessing every horror movie ever made and after listening to every radio chiller the dials had to offer, he became super-discriminating. The conventional slab-faced zombie and slaver-flecked werewolf left him cold. Without moving an eyelash, he could relax by the loudspeaker and listen adamantly to the shrieks of an unfortunate young girl about to be dissected by a tusked fiend. He could take it. He had become a case-hardened horror addict.

In spite of his addiction, he remained a quiet, pleasant-mannered little guy who would not willfully step on a snail.

All of which brought to my clinical mind the question: What would happen if, one fine

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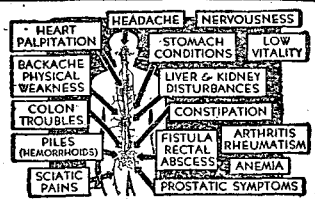


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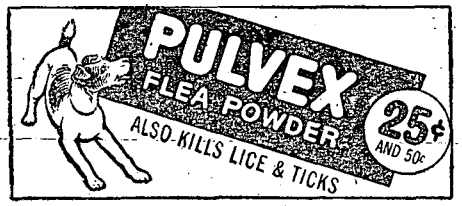


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day, a supernatural creature—a vampire, say, really walked into his house?

Well, you'll have to read "The Spare Room" to find out what might have happened. Maybe I'll have another inspiration sometime.

*Crawford Sullivan.*

### Writer and Character

We've got the idea that this chap, John Thunstone who is making regular appearances in WEIRD TALES these days, is something like another guy named Manly Wade Wellman, who, just incidentally, happens to be the author of the Thunstone yarns.

Wellman was born of an old American family deep in Portuguese West Africa which is a nice beginning for a writer of fantasy and adventure. His enthusiastic interest in occultism survived two university degrees and brief terms of working as farm hand, bouncer, actor, soldier, archivist and newspaper man.

Physically, Wellman is big and heavy. In school he was a footballer, a boxer and a fencer. Despite the fact that he was turned down for combat duty in the present World War he looks to us capable of Thunstone feats today.

All this, of course, is about Manly Wade Wellman; not Thunstone. But one thing, we're sure they have in common. Both men look for adventures and would probably rather experience them than tell about them.

**READERS' VOTE**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEATH'S BOOKKEEPER | GUARD IN THE DARK |
| THE BEASTS OF BARSAC | THE SPARE ROOM |
| JOHN THUNSTONE'S INHERITANCE | THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN |
| PLANE AND FANCY | THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T HANG |
| STRANGER IN THE MIRROR | LADY MACBETH OF PIMLEY SQUARE |

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it in to us.

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Bob Southard, 2929 Collier Ave., Brentwood, Mo.
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Jim Charlton, 736 So. 3rd W., Missoula, Mont.
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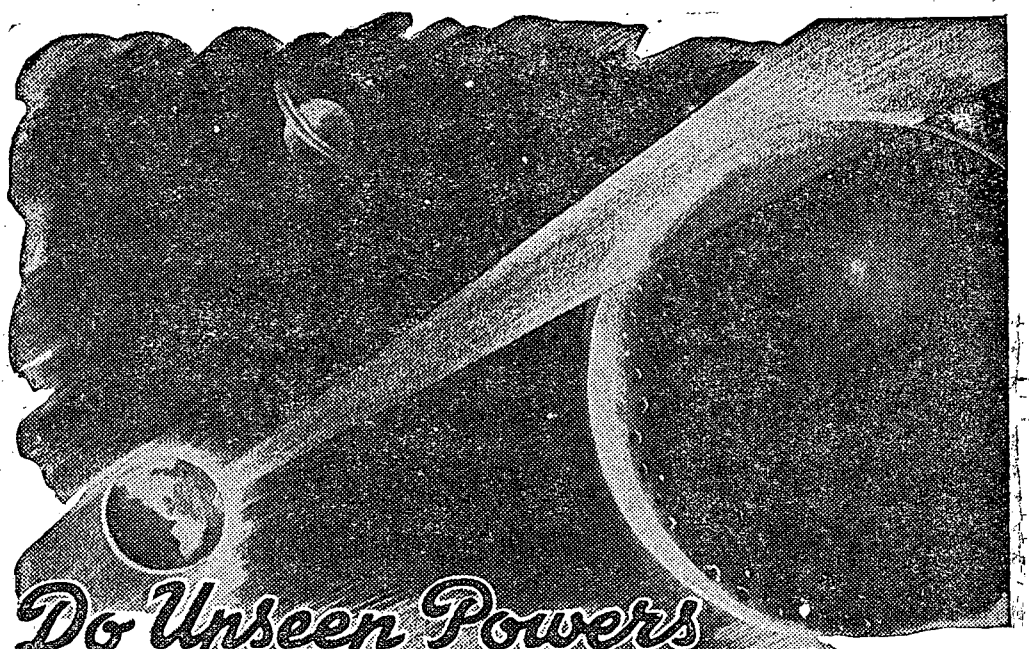

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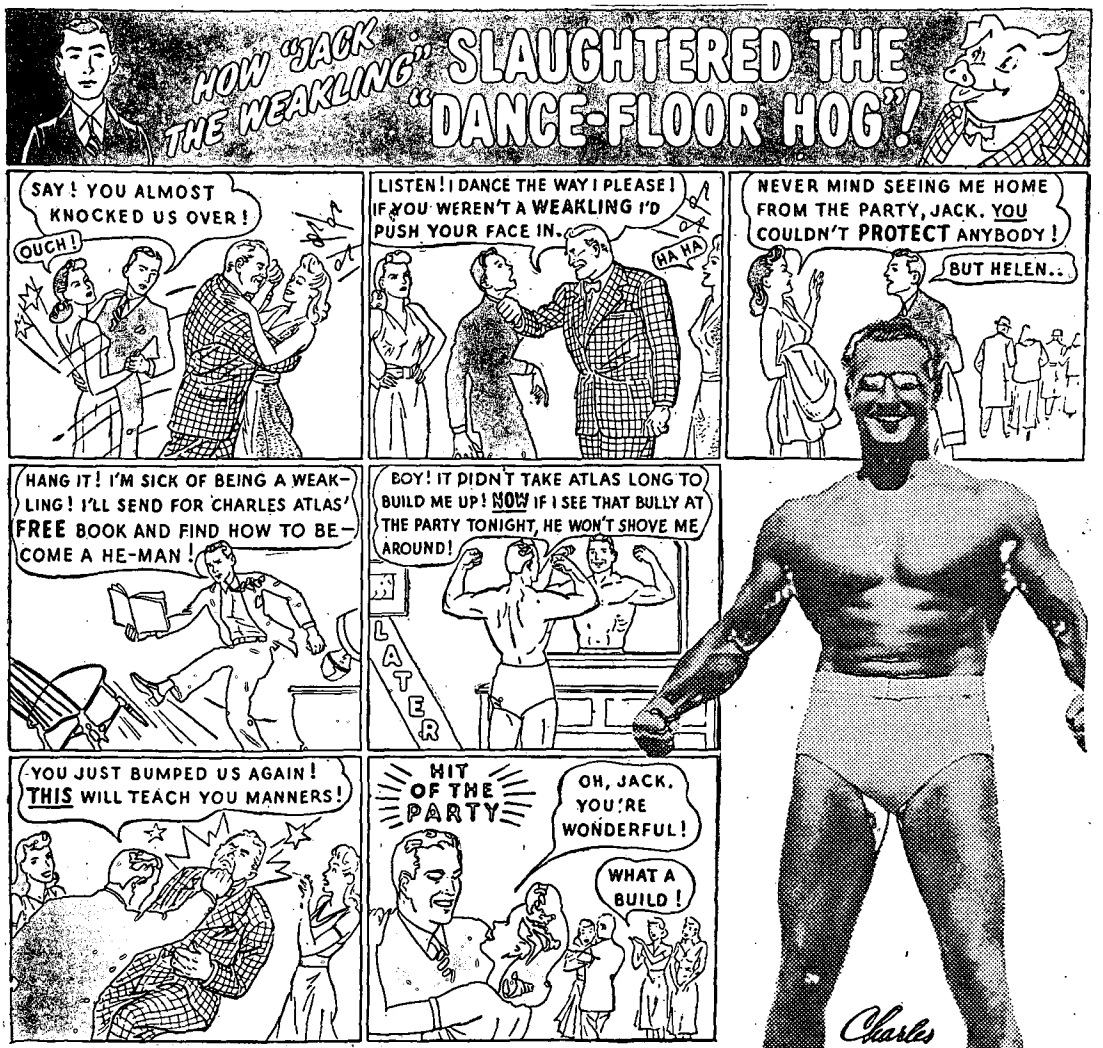



# I Can Make YOU a New Man, Too —in Only 15 Minutes a Day!

HAVE YOU ever felt like Jack—absolutely fed up with having bigger, huskier fellows "push you around"? If you have, then give me just 15 minutes a day! I'll PROVE you can have a body you'll be proud of, packed with red-blooded vitality!

*"Dynamic Tension."* That's the secret! That's how I changed myself from a scrawny, 97-pound weakling to winner of the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

### "Dynamic Tension" Does It!

Using *"Dynamic Tension"* only 15 minutes a day, in the privacy of your own room, you quickly begin to put on muscle, increase your chest measurements, broaden your back, fill out your arms and legs. This easy, NATURAL method will make you a finer specimen of REAL MANHOOD than you ever dreamed you could be!

### You Get Results FAST

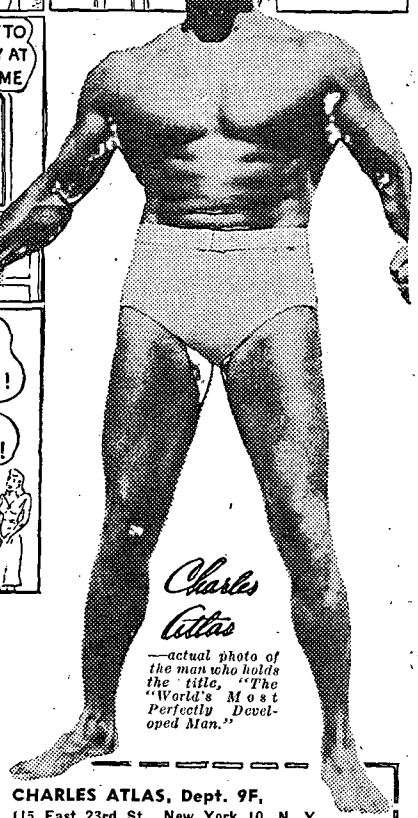
Almost before you realize it, you will notice a general "toning up" of your entire system! You will have more pep, bright eyes, clear head, real spring and zip in your step! You get sledge-hammer fists, a battering-ram punch—chest and back muscles so big they almost split your coat seams—ridges of solid stomach muscle—mighty legs that never get tired. You're a New Man!

### FREE BOOK

Thousands of fellows have used my marvelous system. Read what they say—see how they looked before and after—in my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Send NOW for this book—*FREE.* It tells all about *"Dynamic Tension,"* shows you actual photos of men I've turned from puny weaklings into Atlas Champions. It tells how I can do the same for YOU. Don't put it off! Address me personally:

Charles Atlas, Dept. 9F, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.




*—actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."*

**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9F,**
**115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.**

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ Check here if under 16 for Booklet A

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# HOSPITAL and DOCTOR BILLS PAID!

## HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

**3¢ costs about A DAY**

### COVERS SICKNESS or ACCIDENT

• Do you know that an average of one person out of every ten becomes a hospital patient each year? More than 35,000 patients enter hospitals daily. You, or one of your family might be next! Don't go into debt or bankrupt your savings when Sickness or Accident strikes. Be prepared—protect yourself NOW!

### PAYS BENEFITS FROM FIRST DAY

This dependable Hospitalization Plan PAYS YOUR BILLS FROM THE VERY FIRST DAY exactly as provided. Do not confuse this policy with the others that skip paying benefits for the first 7 or 14 days of disability.

### ISSUED TO INDIVIDUALS or FAMILIES

You or members of your family may be protected against Hospitalization resulting from Sickness or Accident. Everyone, in good health, from 6 months to 70 years of age can now apply for this policy.

### CHOOSE YOUR OWN HOSPITAL and DOCTOR

Any recognized Hospital and any Doctor in the United States or Canada may be selected by you. You are not required to enter any particular Hospital under this liberal Hospitalization plan.

### NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION — NO RED TAPE — NO AGENTS

No medical examination is required. If you are in good health we take your word for it. We have eliminated red tape as well as agents. Mail plan gives maximum insurance at low cost.

### FREE INFORMATION—NO OBLIGATION

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$6.00 EACH DAY **HOSPITAL** $540
Room and Board for Adults up to 90 days

$25 EACH WEEK **LOSS of TIME** $300
From work up to 12 weeks

$135.00 **DOCTOR** $135.00
Expenses

**LOSS of LIFE, LIMBS or SIGHT**
**$1,000.00**

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